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ON  
THE GOSPEL BY ST. JOHN.

BY  
J. G. BELLETT.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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THE four Gospels are coincident testimonies to the Lord Jesus Christ, and valuable as such. But we are not to read them merely as explanatory or supplemental. We get a complete view of our Lord Jesus Christ only by discerning their distinctness in character and purpose.

Even in the histories of men we may perceive this. One biographer may give us the man in his *domestic*, another in his *political* life; but in order to our being fully acquainted with him, we must see him in both of these, and perhaps in many other connections. And one of such biographers will not only select particular facts, but notice distinct circumstances in the same facts. The same thing we see in the four Gospels. And if we know, if not the necessity, at least the desirableness, of this, when a mere man is the theme, how much more may we expect to find it so, when we have rehearsed to us the ways of One who fills such a blessed variety of relationships both to God and man, as the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Holy Ghost, who spake by the prophets and other ancient and holy penmen of Scripture, had done this before the times of the Evangelists. In the first book of Chronicles, for instance, we see David in a light different from that in which we see him in the books of Samuel. In the books of Samuel we get his history generally, but in the first book of Chronicles, we see him not in all the events of his life as in Samuel, but in those scenes and actions which constituted him a type of the Lord who is David's Son. And so, in the second book of Chronicles, as to Solomon. We do not get his full history there, as in the first book of Kings. All his sins are passed by. For it was not as his historian, that the Spirit of God was employing the pen of the scribe, while tracing Solomon in the Chronicles, but rather setting him forth as the type of the Son of David, the king of Israel, in his full beauty, the boast of his own people, and the object of the whole earth's desire.

All this is only fulness and variety, and not incongruity ; and we should have grace to admire the perfection of the wisdom of God, in His holy oracles, in this. And as to the ways of the blessed Lord which are, in this variety, given to us, I need not say that all is perfection. Whether it be this path or that which He takes before us—whatever relationship He sustains—whatever affection fills His soul—though different, all is perfect. He may pass before us in the conscious elevation of the Son of God, or in the sympathies of the Son of man ; we may see Him in Jewish connection, in *St. Matthew* ; or more widely abroad, as among men, in *St. Luke* ; as the servant of the varied need of poor sinners, in *St. Mark* ; or as the solitary stranger from heaven, in *St. John* ; still, all is perfection. And to discern and trace this, is at once the disciple's profit and delight. "Thy testimonies are wonderful ; therefore doth my soul love them."

My present desire, with God's grace, is to speak more particularly of the Gospel by *St. John* ; or, as the expression is, "according to *St. John*"—that is, that form or character of the Gospel which it has been the good pleasure of the Holy Ghost to convey through him.

It is a portion of God's Word which has been very precious to the saints. Many a soul has enjoyed it as such, without, perhaps, exactly knowing why it was so ; for the correctness of our spiritual tastes and desires is often above the measure of our spiritual intelligence. And it is well that it is so.

Before, however, I give what appears to me to be the general character and order of this Gospel, I will suggest some introductory things which have helped me, as I judge, to a fuller understanding and enjoyment of it myself. May the Lord control and guide our thoughts !

From the whole of their history, the people of Israel might have learnt how entirely dependent they were on those resources which God had in Himself, beyond, and independent of, their own system ; for by such resources they had, in all stages of their history, been sustained and conducted. Their father Abraham had been called by an act of sovereign grace (*Josh. xxiv. 2, 3*). God's own hand had preserved and strangely multiplied them in Egypt (*Ex. i. 12*). In distant solitudes, where Israel was not known, Moses was prepared



to be their deliverer from Egypt. All through the wilderness, their journey had shewn them their utter dependence on God. By His Spirit, and not by might nor by power, did Joshua, after Moses, fulfil his ministry, reducing the nations of Canaan. And afterwards, though in different circumstances, there was still the same thing. Joshua's sword, which had been the verifier of the Lord's faithfulness to Abraham and his seed, had no sooner been sheathed, and the blessing transferred from the hand of God which had brought it, to the hand of Israel which was to keep it, than it was lost: it slipped away from its new guardian at once. Faithlessness and weakness were as clearly now marked in Israel, as truth and power had been in Jehovah. Israel and Canaan were Adam and the garden again. Ere the first chapter of the book of Judges closes, Israel, by disobedience, had forfeited everything. The inhabitants of the land were not driven out. But the rest of that book only shews us God's presence among them; repairing the mischief from time to time, with His own hand, and by the energy of His Spirit.

And this must needs be the character of God's acting in a time of forfeited blessing. Either judgment must be executed in righteousness, or blessing be brought in in sovereign grace. Man, by the previous trial, having been found wanting, must be humbled and set aside, and God come in with some new energy of His own to do a strange act—something beside the order of the dispensation, and independent of what were properly its resources. All the deliverances wrought for Israel in the times of the Judges are accordingly of this character. The appearance in Israel of Deborah, Gideon, Jephtha, and Samson, is such a thing as the system, if maintained by its own resources in its own path, would never have led to.\*

Thus as to Deborah—"She judged Israel in those days." But this was not quite such a successor to him who was "king in Jeshurun," as we might have counted upon. The honour had passed into the hand of a woman, for Israel was out of order. Trespass had come in with a disturbing force, and the

\* We have a sample of this even previously to the times of the Judges. The irregular ministry of Eldad and Medad and their companions, was the sovereign provision of God, through the Spirit, for the failure in Moses, for his refusal, through impatience, to proceed with the work that had been exclusively committed to himself. He learnt, to the rebuke of his unbelief, that the Lord's hand had not waxed short. (Numb. xi.)

remedy must be applied, if at all, by God's own hand. And so it was. Therefore, in her magnificent song, she sings—"O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength;" a confession that the source of her strength and victory was all in God, and that in the energy of the Spirit, and in that only, she had fought the battle of the Lord and conquered.

So with Gideon.—He was not of Judah, to whom such honour by ancient right belonged, but of Manasseh, and his family the least in Manasseh. But such an one is called away from his threshing, to bear that sword which was soon to distinguish itself as "the sword of the Lord and of Gideon." And what was this sword of such renown? Three hundred men with trumpets and pitchers! Strange weapons of war against the host of Midian! But Midian ran before them. A cake of barley bread tumbled in, and overturned the tents of the enemy! For it was the Lord Himself who was now in action again, and the treasure of Israel's strength might therefore lie in an earthen vessel.\*

And Jephtha, in his turn, tells the same tale. The son of a strange woman, he had been disclaimed by his brethren in Israel, and cast out among the Gentiles. But this is the one whom the Lord chooses, again to be Israel's saviour in the day of their trouble. But where is Israel's honour now? Where is the glory and worth of their own system, when he, whom his brethren despised and cast out as a base thing, is their only hope in their calamity? The honour was not theirs, nor was the strength of their own system their help and defence now. The Spirit of God, in sovereign grace to Israel, comes upon Jephtha. The battle was the Lord's. Israel had again destroyed himself, but in God was his help.

And all this have we again displayed in Samson. All that ushers in and conducts him in his strange course of action, speaks of the strength and way of God alone. There was nothing in the system of Israel that could account for it. Samson was a child of promise, raised up in the dishonoured tribe of Dan; and, thus, was a sign of God's grace and sovereignty. And according to this, he is at once separated to God, and drawn, as far as might be, out of the strict Jewish order and line of things. The path which he trod lay right

\* 2 Cor. iv. 7, seems to be in allusion to Gideon's lamps and pitchers.

across the beaten path of Israel. The secret of God was with him ; but none knew the riddle but himself. His kindred in the flesh did not know it ; and he has done with father, and mother, and country, and the law of Israel, and is under a new and special dispensation. Contrary to the law, and yet by the direction of the law-giver, he marries a daughter of the Philistines ; he does not go the common way of Israel, or use the resources of Israel, but strange and surprising acts mark his course from the time that the Spirit first moved him in the camp of Dan, to the time when he died in the midst of the Philistine lords. All that he does was of one great character. An unknown energy stirred and conducted him. Israel's resources were again by all this set aside, and God Himself was displayed in His grace and power.

So, after the book of Judges closes, we see the same thing. Samuel, like Samson, was a child of promise ; and a child of promise is always the sign of grace (Rom. ix. 8) ; for it says, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." And therefore at his birth, his mother celebrates, through the Holy Ghost, the praises of grace. He becomes at first a mere waiting boy in the tabernacle ; from thence he is called forth that all Israel might know him to be the prophet of God ; and finally, they see in him the raiser of the stone Ebenezer, the deliverer and help of the nation.

And after him, in David, we again see God's own way and resources displayed in the time of Israel's need. For David was taken from the sheepfolds to feed Israel. His father and his brethren took no account of him ; Israel knew him not : but the Lord chooses and anoints him. He becomes, for a while, an exiled and needy wanderer ; but at last, he has the kingdom settled in his house by a covenant of sure mercies for ever.

Thus from the call of Abraham their father, to the exaltation of David their king, through Moses, Joshua, the Judges and Samuel, every stage in this wondrous journey is accomplished in the grace of God—the resources of their own system, and which lay in their own hands, proving utterly vain.

And I would add, that the prophets were another line of witnesses to the same truth. They were raised up for Israel's guidance, by an extraordinary energy of the Spirit. The primitive settlement of things in Israel did not provide such

a ministry. The nation was to stand in the remembrance and obedience of the words which Moses had delivered. (See Deut. vi., xi., xxxi.) But forgetting these words, an extraordinary presence of the Spirit of God is called for, and then displayed in the person and ministry of the prophets.

Thus, by a line of teachers or prophets, as by another line of rulers or deliverers, testimony to the need of God's resources in their behalf, was left with every succeeding generation of Israel. This was continuously telling out to them, that they could not stand in their own covenant, and that all their hope of final honour and rest lay in the grace and power of God. And so we know it will be—Israel will stand as God's people, in the latter day, in the strength that is laid up for them in Jesus; to whom, therefore, these two lines of witnesses point, and in whom, as the true prophet of Israel, and as the true king of Israel, they will both end. And what refreshing will it be for those who are weary of man, and "sick of his wisdom and his doings," to walk in a sphere where man shall be hid, and God alone displayed! "The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day."

But there was another and a deeper purpose of God, which was constantly seen in the history of Israel also. The eminent persons I have been noticing, were all *of Israel*, and pledged only *Israel's* mercies. But God had purposes beyond Israel—purposes touching *the Gentiles*, of a very exalted character; and this He signified by another line of witnesses, formed, as we shall now see, of eminent personages, who were all of them *Gentiles*, or strangers to Israel.

There appears to have been a body of Gentiles at all times living in the midst of Israel, who take an inferior rank to Israel, though enjoying blessings and ordinances with them.\* But there was also a line of distinguished Gentiles, who, whenever they appeared in the history, took a place, and were called into scenes and services, as did, on the other hand, greatly raise them above the level of Israel. Both of these

\* See Ex. xx. 10; Lev. xvii. 12; xviii. 26; xxvi. 22; Numb. ix. 14; xv. 14, 15, 16, 29; xix. 10; xxxv. 15; Josh. viii. 35; 1 Chron. xxii. 2; 2 Chron. ii. 17; xv. 9; xxx. 25.

things are, I judge, very significant, illustrating the plans then reserved in God's counsels for the Gentiles and strangers, the great body of whom will hereafter in the kingdom take a place subordinate to Israel, though in Israel's joy ; while there will be an elect and distinguished body of them (those who are now called out to form the Church of God), whose place and dignity will be far above that of Israel.

The first of these distinguished strangers who meets us is Melchisedek. The honour that was put upon him needs not to be particularly spoken of ; it is generally so well understood. But he only begins a series of persons, illustrious in their generation and day, like himself.

After him, we meet with Asenath and Zipporah, the wives of Joseph and Moses. They were both strangers to Abraham ; but they became the mothers of those children who were given to these two illustrious fathers in Israel, *while they were in their days separated from Israel* ; and they hold dignities which the chiefest daughters in Israel might have envied.

We are next introduced to Jethro, who, on Israel's coming out of Egypt, takes upon him, without rebuke, though he was but a stranger, to do priestly service in the presence of Aaron, and to give counsel touching affairs of state to Moses. This was occupying, for a while, a very eminent place in the midst of Israel. The brightest glories in Israel were outshone. Moses and Aaron, the king and the priest in Jeshurun, are set aside by this stranger. Fair token, like Melchisedek before, of great things to come to the Gentiles.

After Jethro, we see Rahab, another stranger, but one who, we may all remember, was brought to have a high memorial in Israel ; such a memorial as the daughters of the land longed for continually. For the hope of Israel comes through her after the flesh (Matt. i. 5) ; and she is the one whose faith is spoken of in connection with that of their father Abraham. (James ii.)

Next, in Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, we see the stranger again illustrious. It was by her hand, in a very special manner, that God subdued the king of Canaan before the children of Israel, so that her praise is thus rehearsed—  
“Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be ; blessed shall she be above women in the tent !”



Then, in another female, in Ruth the Moabitess, we see the stranger again. Though the daughter of an unclean and rejected people, she is given a place equal to the chiefest mothers in Israel. Like Rahab before her, the hope of the nation comes through her, according to the flesh (Matt. i. 5); and she is given a standing equal in dignity with Rachel herself. (Ruth iv. 11.) She had no natural kindredness with Israel; but through grace, she is grafted on Israel to become the bearer of the stem of Jesse, on whose branch, as we know, every hope of the people hangs.

And afterwards, in the times of David, we have the stranger kept most honourably in view. This appears first in Uriah. He was a Hittite; but his fidelity to the God of Israel, and self-devoting zeal, in the cause of Israel, shine out blessedly in contrast even with Israel's chiefest and noblest and best child in that day. This poor relic of the defiled Gentiles rebukes no less a son of Israel than king David himself.

We get the stranger again in these times of David, in Ittai the Gittite. (2 Sam. xv.) He, with his 600 men, appears to have joined himself to David, when forced to seek a refuge among the Philistines; and he continued faithful to David down to the very end. He came into the land of Israel with him, after Saul had been removed; and the language of such an act was what Ruth's had been before to Naomi, "thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." He was not of Israel, but more true to Israel's king than Israel; for when his people had revolted to Absalom, and the land was in rebellion, it was this stranger that clung to David whether for life or death.

But in these same days of David, the stranger, or Gentile, is again introduced to us in the person of Araunah; and, as usual, in a way of eminence and honour. David's transgression had brought the nation under judgment; and the angel of the Lord was going through the land slaying his thousands, when, at the bidding of the Lord, his hand is stayed at the threshing-floor of this Jebusite. There it was that mercy *first* rejoiced against judgment. Sin was reigning in Israel unto death; but grace is made to reign unto life *first* in this inheritance of the Gentile. What a high distinction was this! what a note of favour to the Gentiles! Surely all this had a voice, though there was no speech nor language.

Then again, in the times of the kings, I may notice both the widow of Sarepta, and Naaman the Syrian; not that they were either of them ever brought to high estate in Israel, as other strangers whom I have noticed, but they were made the standing monuments of distinguishing and electing grace. (See Luke iv. 25-27.) And after these, we reach Jehonadab the son of Rechab. (2 Kings x.) He is made assessor, with Jehu, in judgment on the house of Ahab. Thus, among the Patriarchs, and successively in the times of Moses and of Joshua, of the Judges, of David, and of the Kings, the stranger is occasionally presented to us, and always in distinction. But beside this *occasional* testimony, there was the *abiding* presence and testimony of the Gentile in Israel: I mean in that family to which this Jehonadab belonged; the family of the Rechabites, who continued in Israel from the earliest times down to the latest, from Moses to Jeremiah. (Jud. i. 16; Jer. xxxv. 8.) And all through these many centuries they dwelt as strangers in the land. At the very first, they went up from the *city*, to dwell in the *wilderness*, and at the very end they are seen maintaining the same character. They neither built houses, nor bought fields, nor sowed seed, nor planted vineyards; all the days they dwelt in tents, and did not eat of the fruit of the vine. *They were a standing order of Nazarites, more separated to God than even Israel*; and so faithful were they to their consecration vows, that at the end, when the Lord was pronouncing judgment upon His own people, He pledged to them that they should not want a man to stand before Him for ever. Throughout the long period of their tabernacling in Israel, wherever we hear of them, it is always to their praise, always taking such a place of honour, and sustaining such a character of holiness, as distinguishes them, like the other strangers, quite above the level of the nation.\*

Now upon all this I would observe, that, as Melchisedek ought to have been to the Jews a notice of a better order of priesthood than that of Aaron (Heb. vii.), so this line of strangers, following as it were in the train of Melchisedek,

\* I may add the cases of the Centurion and the Syrophenician, as the strangers who appear in the midst of Israel, when the times of the New Testament had begun. For, like their more ancient brethren, they appear in great distinction. The Lord signalises them both.

might have been the constant notice of better things in reserve for the Gentiles than all that which had distinguished Israel. Israel might by them have been prepared for the calling out of the Church, which, with the Son of God as her head, is the true stranger upon earth, and which is to hold a more honoured place under God than Israel ever knew. The Church is that to which all these eminent strangers pointed beforehand. For the Church does not tread in Israel's path. She is a stranger where Israel was at home. Her citizenship is in heaven, and not on the earth. The saints are the sons of God, and the world knows them not, even as it knew not Christ. They stand as at the end of the world (1 Cor. x. 11), dead and risen with Christ. Jesus was given no place on earth; and they, as with Him, do but sojourn here, separated in principle from all around them, as the Rechabites were separated from Israel, among whom they did but tabernacle or pitch their tents.

I do not, however, speak of the *histories* of these strangers as typical. I only point to the fact of their high exaltation in Israel, as being a notice from God, of His high exalted purposes concerning the Church, the true stranger. The histories of some of them may have been typical. But it is not the details of their histories that I have been looking at, but simply the fact of their exaltation in Israel.\*

Thus, two lines of personages end in Christ. The line of distinguished Israelites or Jewish worthies, who were called forth in the special energy of the Spirit for the help and guidance of Israel, ends, as I have already noticed, in Christ, as Israel's true prophet and king, "the God of Jeshurun," who, in the latter day, is to be the shield of their help, and

\* I would not, however, refuse to observe, how sweetly Ex. ii. 16-22 unfolds the Church, during the interval from Israel's rejection of Messiah to Messiah's final deliverance of Israel. Zipporah (to whom I have already alluded) becomes debtor for deliverance and life (of which water or a well is the constant emblem) to Moses, in the day of his exile from Israel; and by this, he entitles himself to receive her as his wife from the hand, and with the full approval, of her father. All this is beautifully significant of the mystery of Christ, and the Father, and the Church. And in further proof of this being a type, we may remember that Stephen speaks of the rejection of Joseph and of Moses by their brethren, as kindred with the rejection of Christ by the Jews. Joseph's and Moses' marriage with Gentiles clearly, therefore, set forth the Lord's union with the Church during His rejection and estrangement from Israel.

And I would just notice, that Jehovah's estimate of what a *stranger* was to expect, and the Holy Ghost's estimate by St. Paul, of what a *saint* should expect, is the same. (Deut. x. 18; 1 Tim. vi. 8.

the sword of their excellency. The line of distinguished Gentile strangers, who sustained a character and bore dignities and honours, far above the level or ordinary calling of Israel, ends in Christ as the head of His body, the Church. And the coming kingdom will manifest Him, and those who are severally associated with Him, in these several glories. All things in heaven and on earth shall be then gathered in Him. The true strangers, or the saints, will shine in the heavens, "as the sun in the kingdom of their Father," and Israel will find their rest, their holy rest, on the earth, under David their Prince and Shepherd.

Now, all this leads me to our Gospel; for of Christ as the Son of God, the stranger upon earth, and of the saints who have association with Him in that character, and in relationship to the Father, the Gospel by John is the appropriated witness. Indeed, it is that which gives it its distinction, and makes it, I believe, a portion of the oracles of God most precious to us.

And let me observe, that this office of John under the Holy Ghost suits well with the place which he had previously filled in connection with the Lord Himself. He was the disciple whom Jesus loved, and who lay in His bosom; and now, he is made to tell of Him, whom the Father loved, and who lay in the Father's bosom. It was with his Lord's *person* that John had been familiar, and it is of His *person* that he is now made the special witness.

May we have understanding hearts, to understand the secrets disclosed in this heavenly word! Could we but discern it, every line of it carries with it its own divine authority. But, beloved, the only safe and profitable knowledge is that which we get in communion with the Lord through the Spirit; and that which, when acquired, ministers to still more enlarged communion. May we prove this more and more!

I would now follow our Gospel in its order, observing briefly, and as I may have grace given me, upon it. It will be found naturally to distribute itself into four parts; at least as I have judged, and would now submit to the judgment of my brethren.





ON  
THE GOSPEL BY ST. JOHN.

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CHAPTERS I. TO IV.

I. 1-18. I read these verses as a kind of preface, serving to introduce this Gospel in its due character, as the Gospel of the Son of God—the Son of the Father—and the Baptist's testimony is here summarily appended to this preface, as serving the same end.

And here I remark, that the place which our blessed Lord *immediately* takes, on His appearing upon earth, is that which I have already observed belongs to Him as the Son of God, and to the Church with Him, that is, the place of *a stranger*. He is here shewn to us at once in this character. He is as light in the midst of darkness; the maker of the world, and yet not known of the world; coming to His own, and yet not received of His own; made flesh, and yet only tabernacling for a while among us. All this shows Him to be the Stranger here; it is thus that this Gospel introduces Him. And accordingly, at the beginning, it assumes that His question with the world, and with His earthly people Israel, were both determined (see ver. 11, 12). The Spirit of God in our Evangelist at once shuts up the world under the condemnation of being “without God,” and concludes Israel in unbelief; and upon this,

brings out an elect family, not registered in the earth, or born of flesh, but born of God, for whom "grace and truth," the fulness of the Father in the Son, were now provided.

The book of Genesis opens with creation; but the Gospel by St. John opens with Him who was before creation and above creation. It is to Him that we are immediately taken. Creation is passed by, and we get to "the Word," who was with God, and was God.

This is the opening of our Gospel, defining it to be the Gospel of the Son of God, the Creator of all things, the Declarer of the Father, the Fountain and the Channel of grace and truth to sinners. And according to this, the glory which St. John tells us we have beheld, is that "of the only begotten of the Father;" that is, a *personal* glory; while the glory which the other Evangelists record as having been beheld, was the glory on the holy mount, that is, an *official* glory merely. And this again characteristically marks the end and bearing of this Gospel.

Very blessed, as well as very elevating and divine, are the thoughts suggested by these introductory verses. They tell us, beside what I have observed above, that the light, the living light, shined in darkness ere the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us; yea, ere His harbinger, the Baptist, was sent forth by God. Just as in the old creation. Light was the first element <sup>2</sup> under the forming power of God. It went before the sun. The sun was the creature of the *fourth* day, but light was the prime creature of the *first*. The first three days, therefore, walked in the light of light merely, without the presence of that which afterwards ruled the day. And so has it been, as these verses tell

us, in the history of the living Light. Christ was the earliest thought from God that rose upon the moral darkness and chaos of apostate man. In the promise "it shall bruise thy head," the living light sprang forth. Days or dispensations succeeded. The first three days again, as it were, took their course. The ages of the Patriarchs and of Moses spent themselves. But the light of life had gone abroad, though as yet the Word had not been made flesh. The light shined before the sun was set in the heavens. And this is a happy thought. The Christ of God was the earliest revelation that arose upon the ruins and darkness of Adam; and though for a season that divine depositary of all light, that great source of all vivifying beams, remained unmanifested, yet effulgences worthy of Him, and which belonged to Him, came forth to cheer and guide preceding ages, the first, the second, and the third day.

But heat as well as light is ours, I might say. For this same wondrous Scripture tells us, that "the bosom of the Father" has been disclosed to us. "The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." There is nothing like that. The deep, unspeakable, unfathomable love that dwells in that bosom is the love that has visited us, in the warmth of which we have been addressed. And how surpassing all knowledge is such a thought as that! Well may we ask to be strengthened with might by the Spirit to comprehend it (Eph. iii. 16-19). It is the heaven of the heart to be still and silent, and in simple faith to let such a revelation tell out its tale upon us.

19-28. These verses are also somewhat introductory; the action can scarcely be said to have commenced; for they give us, *by way of recital*, the

Baptist's testimony to the Jews, before the Lord Jesus had been manifested to him as the Son of God. For so little had the Spirit of God in St. John to do with Jewish testimony, that all this is given here, as I have just observed, by way of recital, telling us what *had been* the Baptist's confession to the messengers of the Jews.

29-42. Here, however, the action fully opens. And this is with the Baptist's direct testimony to Jesus, after the manifestation of Him as Son of God. But having borne witness to Him, the Baptist appears as one who had consciously fulfilled his course. In the 35th verse, he is as one who had retired from his ministry, and was simply enjoying that in which it had all resulted—the manifestation of the Lamb of God. He is heard uttering the hidden satisfaction of his soul, when he said, “Behold the Lamb of God!” For he does not appear to have addressed these words to his disciples; but they, hearing him thus in holy happy contemplation of Jesus, follow Jesus. And, beloved, it is this which gets the same honour now. Our power in drawing others after the Lord mainly rests in our joy and communion with Him ourselves. John was done with himself, and was lost in thoughts of the Lamb of God, and his disciples seem to catch his mind, for they leave him and follow Jesus.

This was real ministry, ministry in power over the affections of those who heard. As the Apostle speaks in 1 Thess. i. 5, 6.

But where, I ask, do John's disciples follow Jesus? We are not told. In all grace the Lord encouraged them to follow, and they came and saw where He dwelt, and abode with Him that day; but where it was we

know not. They follow Him along some untold path, and were with *Himself*: but that is all we learn. For the Son of God was but a stranger on the earth; and they, if with Him, must be strangers too, without place or name here. And so is it here signified. This little gathering was to the Son of God, and to the Lamb of God; but it was not here—in principle, the *earth* did not own the place, for this was the first handful of wheat for the *heavenly* granary, the first-fruits of the heavenly family unto God and the Lamb.

The Baptist speaks of Jesus being really before him, though coming after him; and he repeats this as with some jealousy (verses 15, 27, 30). And St. Paul, referring to John's ministry, alludes to this feature of it (Acts xix. 4). But this is very blessed; for in this the Holy Ghost, who spake by John, honours Jesus as the great Subject of all the divine counsels, the great Ordinance of God, to whom all other ordinances pointed. And therefore, though He came after them, He was before them; and John, as if speaking the mind of all ordinances and ministries, says, "He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me." For it was the Son alone that had been set up from everlasting (Prov. viii. 23), the great first object in all the divine counsels; and every prophet and ordinance was but His servant, for a testimony to Him.

And again I observe, that John and the Lord had no knowledge of each other till Jesus came forth in ministry. John had been brought up in Judea; our Lord in Galilee. But on the Lord's approaching John to be baptized, John at once acknowledged Him—acknowledged Him without any introduction. There seems to have been in his soul some consciousness that



this was He (Matt. iii. 14). He had, indeed, acknowledged Him even before He was born (Luke i. 44). The world knew Him not, but John knows Him, and thus condemns the world. But he does not know Him so as to bear witness to Him as the Son of God, till the Spirit descends and abides on Him—for that, as John was admonished, was to be His divine attestation.

And further—I must observe that this Gospel, in full consistency with its general character, gives us, in these verses, what I may term the *personal* call of Andrew and Peter; while St. Matthew, not noticing this, gives us their *official* call. But this is in beautiful order with the mind of the Spirit in the two Evangelists; with such thankfulness and delight should we mark the perfection of the divine testimonies. (Matt. iv. 18.)

43–51. In these verses we have the action of a subsequent period, called “the day following.” This action is the ministry of Jesus Himself, and the fruit of that ministry in the persons of Philip and Nathanael.

This is a new thing. This was not a gathering to Him as “the Lamb of God,” in a secret, unnamed place, as the former had been, but a gathering to Him as the One “of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write.”\* And, therefore, this is a sample, not as the former was, of the Church or heavenly family, but of the Israel of God that is to be saved in the latter day, and which will be known to Him in grace, in the midst of the nation, as Nathanael here is known to Him while under the fig-tree—the standing symbol of the Jewish nation. (Matt. xxi. 19.) And

\* This is characteristic; that is all I mean. Of course, *all* gathered to Jesus, at whatever time, know Him as the Lamb of God.

they will make the same confession to Him as Nathanael does. They will own Him and receive Him as the Son of God and the king of Israel. And when this comes to pass, all will be ready for the display of the glory, the distant glimpse of which the Lord here accordingly catches, and a sight of which, in due season, He promises to Nathanael, the representative, as we have seen, of His Israel.

All this is very significant, and will be found to be confirmed by the opening of the following chapter.

II. 1-12. We have just had the Church and Israel severally manifested in the two gatherings to Christ in the previous chapter. Accordingly, we here get "the third day," or the marriage, the wine for which Jesus Himself provided.

Now these circumstances give notice of the mystic import of the scene. For the "third day" (which is the same as the resurrection-day), the marriage, and the wine of the Lord's own providing, are things which stand allied with *the kingdom*, in the thoughts of those who are familiar with Scripture. And thus, I doubt not, this marriage sets forth the coming kingdom of the Lord, where He is to appear as both king and bridegroom.

To this marriage in Cana, the Lord had been bidden as a guest; but at the close of it, He becomes the host providing and dispensing the wine. So, by and by, when we have tasted of the inferior joy which our skill or diligence may have provided, He Himself will prepare the joy of the kingdom, and drink anew with us there of the fruit of the vine. And by this easy gracious action, He transforms the mere marriage-feast

of Cana into a mystery, and makes it the occasion of "manifesting his glory," setting forth in it that kingdom which Nathanael had owned in His person. He becomes Himself the host or bridegroom. The governor sends to the bridegroom who had bidden them, as though he were the one; but it was Jesus who provided the joy of the place, and who is still keeping "the good wine" for His people till the last—till all other joy is over. Jesus was the true bridegroom. This was the feast where He turned the water into wine; as He will in the kingdom again pass by all our resources of joy, and give what eye hath not seen, nor the heart of man conceived.

And from this let me take occasion to say, that we should deeply cherish the assurance that *joy* is our portion, the ordained or necessary element in which our eternity is to move. For our hearts are wont "to entertain joy with suspicion." But we must deny that tendency, and urge and keep the heart in another direction. "Joy is that which is *primary*, toil, danger and sorrow are only *subservient*," as another has said. And that is a truth full of comfort. When the counsels of old were taken, and the order of creation planned, that was a scene and season of divine joy. The Lord delighted in Wisdom then, and Wisdom or Christ delighted in the sons of men, and in the habitable parts of the earth (Prov. viii.). And this joy of God Himself was communicated. The angels felt and owned it (Job xxxiii. 7). And of course, creation, in that day of its birth, smiled also.

And the ruin of this system, through the apostacy of man, has not hindered joy, but only changed its character. Redemption becomes another source of

gladness, enhanced and enlarged, and of deeper tone. The new creation will be the occasion of a still richer joy than the old had been. What meat has the eater yielded! What savoury meat which the soul of Jesus Himself loveth! What sweetness out of the strong one even unto God! What springs have been opened in the barren sands of this ruined world for the refreshing even of heavenly regions!

All Scripture gives us this witness, and we need not further rehearse it. But upon the verses now before us, I cannot refuse adding (so sweet are these notices of the saints' interest in these things), that it is *the servants*, and they only, who are thrown into connection with the Lord. They are in His secrets, while even the governor knows nothing about them. And the mother also (kindred with Him in the flesh) is thrown at a distance from Him (ver. 4). It was *the servants* who were brought the nearest to Him in the whole scene. And so with us, beloved. Jesus, the Lord of glory, the heir of all things, was a servant here; He came "not to be ministered unto, but to minister;" and those who are humblest in service are still cast the nearest to Him. And in the day when He will provide the true wine of the kingdom, His servants that have served Him shall, as here, be dispensers of the joy under Him, and be distinguished as in the secret of His glory. "If any man *serve me*, him will my Father *honour*."

13-22. After all this, we see our Lord at Jerusalem, with authority cleansing the temple, and thus asserting the royal prerogatives of the Son of David. (See Matt. xxi. 12.)

To this authority He is challenged for His title, and

He simply pleads *His death and resurrection*.\* “Destroy this temple,” says He, “and in three days I will raise it up.” And so it is. This is His title. His rights and honours as Creator of the world and Lord of Israel, were, as we saw, denied him. (See i. 10, 11.) His title to them was disallowed. And we know that He has acquired all power in heaven and earth by another title, death and resurrection, which has displaced the usurper, and regained for man the forfeited inheritance. This gives Him sure unquestionable right to every thing. The Apostles constantly interpret the Lord’s death and resurrection as establishing and sealing His titles to His many crowns and glories. The preaching of Peter in Acts ii. is a testimony to this. He tells the people of Israel that with wicked hands they had put Him to death, but that God had raised Him and made Him Lord and Christ. The teaching of Paul in Phil. ii. among other Scriptures, tells us the same. And in this place, in answer to the challenge of the Jews, the blessed Jesus Himself pleads His death and resurrection as His title to His highest functions, and the exercise of royal and priestly authority. Because He humbled Himself, God has given Him a name which is above every name. The Son of David, according to Paul’s Gospel, was raised from the dead. (2 Tim. ii. 8.) The *crown* of Jesus rested on His *cross* in the sight of all the world, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.

\* In the Gospel by St. Matthew, when the Lord is challenged for His title to the same authority, He refers to the ministry of John the Baptist, and not, as here, to His death and resurrection (Matt. xxi. 23, 27). But this only preserves the characteristic difference of the two Gospels; for John’s ministry was the verifier of His authority to the Jews, death and resurrection is the verifier of it to every creature.



(Luke xxiii. 38.) All the testimony thus publishes, as Jesus Himself pleads here, that His sufferings lead to His glories (1 Pet. i. ii.), that death and resurrection is His title.

23.—III. 21. Thus the joy of the kingdom was exhibited, the power of the kingdom exercised, and the Lord's title to it set forth and pleaded. Now, in due course, the title of others to enter into the same kingdom with Him, becomes the question; and this question accordingly is here discussed. And deeply affecting to us all, is this holy and solemn matter.

Man is a creature whom the Lord the Creator cannot trust. Adam's breach of allegiance in the garden made him so. Man did all he could to sell God's glory into the hand of another. The dispensation of the law has proved him to be still unworthy of the confidence of God, and this character is here stamped on him by the Lord Himself. "Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men." He knew what was in man, and He could find nothing that He could trust. What a sentence! Nay, more than this. Man, as he is, can never be so improved as to be trusted again by God; man's affections may be stirred, man's intelligence informed, man's conscience convicted; but still God cannot trust him. Thus we read, that "many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles that he did, but Jesus did not commit himself unto them." Man in this was putting forth his best; he was moved by the things which Jesus did; but still the Lord could not trust him. Hence, "ye must be born again." —

The necessity of being born again or from above, or, as it is commonly expressed, of regeneration, is well

understood and most surely allowed among the saints. But is there not a more simple and distinct character in the new birth than is generally apprehended? I judge there is. For *the doctrine commonly raises in the mind a sense of something strange and indefinite.* But this need not be.

Nicodemus had come as a pupil to Jesus. "We know that thou art a teacher come from God," he says; upon which the Lord tells him at once, that he must be born again. But He does not end His words with him till He directs him to the brazen serpent, teaching him that it is *there* he must go in order, as it were, to gather up the seed of this needed new life.

In what character, then, must he take his place there, and look at the Son of Man lifted up on the cross? Simply *as a sinner*, a conscious sinner, carrying, like the bitten Israelite, the sentence of death in himself. Such an one Nicodemus had still to know himself to be, for as such an one he had not now come to Jesus; and therefore he must begin his journey afresh, he "must be born again," he must reach Jesus by a new path, and in a new character. He judged himself to be a pupil, and Jesus a teacher come from God; but himself as a dead sinner, or as a man bitten by the old Serpent, and the Son of God as a quickening Spirit, a justifying Redeemer, he did not yet understand; and so the ground of his heart had never yet received the seed of life.

The *character* of this life, this eternal life, this divine nature in us, is thus as simply defined as its *necessity*. The secret of it lies in learning Jesus the Son of God, *as a Saviour*, in coming to Him as a poor convicted sinner, looking at Him in that virtue which the brazen serpent carried for the bitten Israelite. And, as sug-

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gested by other parts of this Gospel, it is very sweet to trace the onward path of Nicodemus from this stage of it. He had, as we have seen, hitherto mistaken his road ; but though that may give him a longer journey, it proves, from the direction which Jesus here gives him, in the end a right and a safe one. For in the next stage of it, we see him standing for Jesus in the presence of the council, and meeting something of the reproach of the rejected Galilean (ch. vii.). And at the close, he stands where the Lord at this outset directed him, at the place of this brazen serpent. He looks at the Son of Man lifted on the cross. He goes to Jesus, not as a pupil to a teacher ; but he goes to Him, and owns Him, and honours Him, no longer *by night*, nor in *the presence of the council* merely, but in *the broad day-light*, and in *the presence of the world*, as the wounded, smitten, and bruised Lamb of God (chap. xix). He was slow-hearted perhaps. *But the serpent is still on the pole even for such.* It hangs there still, waiting to be gracious.

Thus we discern *the character*, as simply as we learn *the need*, of this new life. We find out the seed that produces it. The divine power, the Holy Ghost, who presides over all this in His own energy, works after a manner beyond our thoughts. Whether the wind or the Spirit, we know not the path thereof. But the nature of the seed he uses, and of the soil in which he casts it, are thus made known to us. The one is the word of salvation, the other the soul of a poor convicted sinner.

And this life which flows through the family of God is *spirit*—because Jesus, the second man, the head of it, is “a quickening Spirit”—and “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit,” as our Lord here teaches. This

is our new life. It is eternal, infallible life ; standing, whether in the head or members of the body where it moves, in victory over all the power of death. And our divine Teacher further says, "except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." There is no entrance there for any but new-born ones, *and such new-born ones as we have seen, sinners justified or quickened by the word of salvation.* There are no righteous ones, no wise or rich ones in that kingdom, none who stand in such like confidence in the flesh. This truth is thus established. Blessedly, for our joy and stability of heart. For while this is very decisive, it is very comforting. It is very comforting to see that the word, which says, Except ye be born again ye cannot see the kingdom, thereby clearly lets us know that if we be born again we shall see it—no fraud or force of men or devils shall prevail to keep us outside of it. If we will take (drawn doubtless by the drawing of the Father, in the secret power of the Holy Ghost) the place of poor convicted sinners, and receive the word of salvation from the Son of God—if we but look as bitten Israelites to the uplifted serpent—then the kingdom is already entered, life is now enjoyed, and glory shall be. The song that we then sing is but echoed through the eternity of heaven. The sight that we then get of Jesus and His salvation is but enlarged in the sphere of coming glory. We *have* eternal life, and the principles of heaven in us.

But to return for another moment to Nicodemus, I may say that, when the Lord had thus disclosed the seed of this new life to him, He seeks to sow it in him, to sow it (where it ever must be sowed, if unto fruit) *in the conscience* : for Nicodemus had come to the Lord

by night, as though his deeds could not bear the light; and the Lord aiming, as it would seem, to reach his conscience, just on their parting, says, "every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved."

Thus our Lord teaches the need of the new birth, through the word of salvation. Without it man cannot be trusted of God; and without it the kingdom of God could not, as our Lord here further teaches us, be either seen or entered. What association, for instance, had the elder brother with that which was the characteristic joy of the father's house? None! He ~~never had so much as~~ a kid to make merry with his friends: none but a returned prodigal could draw forth the ring, the best robe, and the fatted calf. And so the kingdom is such a kingdom, as none but *redeemed sinners* can apprehend its joys, or have any place in it. All there are "new creatures," persons of an order not found in the first creation. Adam was made upright; but all in the kingdom are blood-bought sinners. Every thing in it is reconciled by blood—as it is written—"and having made peace through the blood of His cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether things in earth, or things in heaven."

22-36. After the Lord had thus discussed with Nicodemus the question of man's entrance into the kingdom, He is seen for a little moment pursuing His ministry, as minister of the circumcision in Judea. (Ver. 22.) But we see this only for a moment; for to detain such things before us would not have been within the general scope of this Gospel, which takes the Lord, as we have seen, out of Jewish connection. And in the

next passage we may notice the same (ver. 23, 24) ; for the Baptist is seen in connection with Israel ; but it is, in like manner, only for a passing moment ; and in order, too, as it would seem, to give him occasion, under the Holy Ghost, to bear a testimony to Jesus, not at all in His Jewish glory, but in higher honours and sweeter joys, than Christ could have ever known as Son of David. (See ver. 27-36.)

I would, however, linger here a little, for this appears to me to be an occasion of great moral value. John is called into the same trial as Moses in Numb. xi. and as Paul in 1 Cor. iii. - 6

Joshua, who was Moses' minister, envied for his master's sake when Eldad and Medad prophesied in the camp. But Moses rebuked him, and that too, not with a word only, but also by an act—for he goes at once into the camp, evidently for the purpose of enjoying and profiting by the gift and ministrations of those two, on whom the Spirit had just fallen.

This was a noble way in this dear man of God. No grudging or jealousy soiled the fair form of his heart, or disturbed the even flow of his soul ; but, endowed vessel as he was, rich and large in the gifts of the Spirit himself, he would still receive through any other vessel though of smaller quantity, and receive with thankfulness and readiness of heart.

Paul, in his day, was summoned to the like trial. In the midst of the saints at Corinth, rivalries had risen. Some were saying, "I am of Paul, and I of Apollos." And how does Paul meet this? Does he triumph in this day of the tempter, as Moses had triumphed? Yes, only with a different weapon. With strong hand and fervent heart he breaks every vessel to pieces, that

He who fills all vessels, and He only, might have all the praise. "Who then is Paul and who is Apollos?" says he—"neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God, that giveth the increase." This was victory in a like evil hour, but only in a different form, or with another weapon.

But how are we to contemplate John? On this occasion, he meets the same way of the tempter. His disciples are envious of Jesus, for his sake. But like Moses and Paul, he stands in the evil day, though somewhat in a different attitude. He cannot, with Paul, break to pieces his companion-vessel. He cannot say, "who then is John, and who is Jesus?"—as Paul says, "who then is Paul, or who is Apollos?" He could not deal with the name of Jesus, as Paul deals with the name of Apollos. But he breaks one of these rival vessels, that is, himself, to pieces, under the eyes of his fond disciples, and glorifies Jesus whom they were envying for his sake, with glories beyond all their thought, and such as no other vessel could hold.

How perfect was all this! How beautiful a witness is all this method of John, in handling such an occasion, to the guiding and keeping of the Spirit of wisdom! Jesus, it is true, was, in one sense, a vessel of God's house, like prophets and apostles. He was a minister of the circumcision. Like John, He preached the coming of the kingdom. He piped, and John lamented. God spake by Him, as by any prophet. And thus He was, most surely, a vessel in God's house, as others. But he was of a peculiar order. The material and the moulding of that vessel were peculiar. And if occasion bring Him into question with any other vessel, as in this place of our Gospel, the peculiar



honour which attaches to His must be made known. John delights to be the instrument for this. He delights, as under the Holy Ghost, and as in full concord with the mind of God, to bring out the budding rod of the true Aaron, blooming with its fruit and flowers, and to expose every rival rod in its native dead and withered state, that the murmurings of Israel, the fond and partial thoughts of even his own disciples, may be silenced for ever. (Numb. xvii.) He acknowledges that all his joy was fulfilled in that, which was thus provoking the displeasure of his disciples. He was but the bridegroom's friend. He had waited for such a day as this. His course was now therefore run, and he was willing to retire and be forgotten. Like his fellow servants the prophets, he had held up a light to guide his generation to Christ, to lead the bride to the bridegroom; and now, he had only to retire. He stands here, as at the end of the line of prophets; and, in his own name and theirs, leaves all in the hand of the Son. And when he gets on this theme (the glories of Him who was greater than he), how gladly does he go on with it. The Spirit leads him from one ray of this glory to another; and blessed is it, when Jesus is the theme that thus awakens all our intelligence and desire. Blessed, when we can, each of us, be thus willingly nothing, that He alone may fill all things.

Be it so with thy saints, Lord, through thy heavenly grace, more and more!

IV.—Thus John is gone, and with him everything but the ministry of the Son. All now lies in His hand alone; and, accordingly, He goes forth simply as the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. He appears

before us here (iv. 1) as one that was rejected of Israel, and is now leaving Judea, the place of righteousness, simply as the Saviour of sinners. And going forth in this character, He must needs go through an unclean place, and find His journeying among us to cost Him bitter pain and weariness; the sample of which we get here.

It was quite in consistent righteousness, that the Jews refused all commerce with the Samaritans. It was according to their calling to say, "it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew, to keep company or come unto one of another nation;" for this was a testimony against evil; and such testimony was the very trust which Jehovah had committed to Israel. They were to be God's witnesses against the world; they were the clean separated from the unclean, for a testimony to the righteousness of God against a corrupted earth. But Jesus was now standing aloof from Israel. He had — left Judea, the place of righteousness, and was standing in defiled Samaria as Son of God, the Saviour of sinners. He had already gone to Judea looking for righteousness, the proper fruit of that country, but had not found it; He is not now to look for it in Samaria. Here He must be in another way altogether, in the way of grace only; and in the consciousness that He was so, that He was here only in grace, as the Saviour of sinners, He addresses Himself to a woman who had come to draw water at the well of Sychar.

There had been from the beginning a secret with God, beyond and behind all the revealed requisitions and order of righteousness which had been established in Judea. There was "grace and the gift by grace." (The Jew might have had committed to him a testimony

to righteousness *against* the world, but the Son was the gift of God *to* the world, entrusted with life for it. "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ;" and in the blessed consciousness that He carried with Him this secret of grace for sinners, He says to the woman, "give me to drink." She wonders, as well she might, that He did not keep His distance as a Jew. But she did not yet know, that the secret of God was with Him. This, however, was soon to be disclosed. The glory that excelleth was about to fill this unclean place. The Lord God is now taking His stand, not on the burning mount in righteousness, but at the head of the river of life, as its Lord, ready to dispense its waters.

What blessing is thus preparing for this poor outcast! None other than an outcast could know it. But such must also know, that the source of this blessing is not in themselves. And this the Samaritan learns. She is made to know herself, to look well around on all things that ever she did, and to see that it left her only a wilderness and land of darkness. Her conscience is dismayed. "He whom thou now hast is not thy husband." But wilderness and land of darkness as it was, the Son of God was there with her. This was blessing, such blessing as an outcast in a wilderness could know. It was to outcast Jacob who had only the stones of the place for his pillow, the heaven was opened, and God in fullest grace and glory was revealed. So here, with this daughter of Jacob. The Lord was again opening the rock in the desert. The ark of God was now again planted with the camp in the midst of the wilderness. The unclean Samaritan is spoken to by the Lord of the well of life; and this was joy and the power of love to

her. It separates her from her pitcher, and fills her spirit and her lips with a testimony to His name.

Beloved, this is divine ! A poor Samaritan, whom righteousness had bidden to stand by in an unclean place, is made the pattern of the workmanship of Jesus, and taken into the secrets and intimacies of the Son of God ! It is her very place and character of *sinner* which throws her in His way. It is only the *sinner* that lies in the *Saviour's* path. And, brethren, whatever of sorrow or of trial the entrance of sin may have caused us, or may have still to cause us, yet without it we could not have had our God, as we now have Him, opening His own bosom, the treasure-house of love, and from thence giving us forth the Son.

The disciples, on their return, wonder, like the woman, that Jesus had not kept His Jewish distance. But still, they are conscious of the presence of a glory that was above them ; for “no man said, what seekest thou ? or, why talkest thou with her ?” They did not as yet know the secret which the Son of God carried ; and He then shews them, as white already for harvest, fields which their faith had never surveyed. They knew of no fields, but such as, of old, had been parted among the Tribes. In their esteem, God’s husbandry must be confined to that sacred enclosure ; and Samaria, they judged, was now outside that, and but an unclean place. But there was, as we have already seen, a secret with God. It was the Son of God, the Saviour of sinners, who had now gone forth with seed, and His toil had prepared a harvest for the reapers, in the defiled plains of Samaria.\* He shews His disciples a

\* I would observe, that in our Lord’s considering the question of “worship,” to which the woman drew Him off, He still speaks

company just coming out of Sychar, who were soon to say, "this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world." And thus were they ready for the sickle. The harvest in Judea was *plenteous* (Matt. ix. 37); but in Samaria it was *ripe for the reapers*. The Lord had borne the toil of the sower; had talked, weary and faint, with the woman; but He would now share with His disciples the joy of the harvest; and in pledge of this, He abides for two days with this little gathering out of Sychar, believed on and owned as the Saviour of the world.

The nearness to Himself to which the Lord invites the soul, the intimacy with which He seeks to invest the heart of a believing sinner, it is most blessed to know. He does not deal with us *in the style of a patron or benefactor*. The world is full of that principle. "They that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors." (Luke xxii. 25.) Man will be ready enough to confer benefits in the character of a patron, occupying all the while the distant place of both conscious and confessed superiority. But this is not Jesus. He can say, "not as the world giveth give I unto you." He brings His dependent one very near to Him. He lets him know and feel that He is dealing with him as

in His character *as Son*. The woman addresses Him as a Jew, but He does not answer her as a Jew. He rather shews that all Jewish worship was now ending; and in the consciousness that the Son had now come, He teaches her that the hour was come, when all accepted worship must be in the spirit of adoption, that it was *the Father* who was now claiming worship. His whole reply expresses the consciousness of this, that He was addressing the woman, not as the Son of David who had come to purify the temple and bring back the revolted Samaritans from "this mountain," but as the Son who was come to give all sinners access by *one Spirit unto the Father*.

a kinsman rather than as a patron. But that makes all the difference. I am bold to say that heaven depends on this difference. The expected heaven of the soul, and which in spirit it tastes now, depends on the Lord Jesus not acting with us on the principle of a patron. Heaven would then be only a well ordered world of human principles and benevolences. And what a thing that would be! Is it the condescendings of a great one that we see in Christ? "I am among you as one that serveth," says He. Every case, I may say, tells me so. His was never the style of a mere benefactor; the distance and elevation of a patron. "He bore our sicknesses and carried our sorrows."

Just look at Him at this well, with this Samaritan. She had, at that moment, the most exalted thoughts of Him. "I know that Messiah cometh which is called Christ—when He is come, He will tell us all things." This was her high and just sense of the Messiah, not knowing that He, to whom she was then speaking face to face, could say immediately in answer to her, "I that speak unto thee am he."

But where was He, the exalted Christ, all this time? Sitting on one stone with her; talking with her as they had met together, by the side of a well, where (in order to give her ease in His presence) He had asked her for a drink of water!

Was this patronage after the manner of men? Was this the distance and condescension of a superior? Was this heaven or the world, man or God? Condescension or the world will confer what favour you please, but will have the elevation of a superior and the reserve of a dependent kept and honoured. But heaven or love acts not thus. Blessed, blessed be God!



Jesus, "God manifest in the flesh," was *kinsman* to them He befriended. And as a kinsman He acted, not as a patron. He seeks to bring us near, to invest our hearts with ease and confidence. He visits us. Nay, He comes to us upon our invitation—as He went and dwelt two days with the Samaritans who came out and sought His company on the report of the woman. He asks for a favour at our hand, that we may take a favour from His without reserve. He will drink out of our pitcher, to encourage us to drink of His fountains, and eat of our kid at the tent door while revealing eternal secrets to us. (Gen. xviii.; John iv.)

Surely our hearts may rejoice over this. The heart of the Lord rejoices in this His own way of love. For these two days at Sychar were to Him a little of the joy of harvest. They were some of the most refreshing which the wearied Son of God ever tasted on this earth of ours. For He found here some of the brightest faith He ever met with; and it was only the faith of sinners that could ever have refreshed Him here. Nothing in man could ever have done this—nothing but that faith which takes man out of himself.

But this joy was only for two days. He is quickly called down to a lower region; for after these two days He goes on to Galilee, thus getting into Jewish connection again: but He goes with this sad foreboding, "A prophet has no honour in his own country." And with increased trial of heart must He feel this now, from the liberty which He had just been knowing among the poor sinners in Samaria. And His foreboding was found to be true. He finds faith in Galilee, it is true, but faith of an inferior order. The Galileans receive Him, but it is "because they had seen all

things that he did at Jerusalem." The nobleman and his house believed, but not until they had carefully verified Him by their own witnesses. The gathering at Sychar had believed Himself, the Galileans now believe Him for His works' sake (see xiv. 11); the Samaritans knew him as in Himself, the Jews were now, as it were, asking a sign again. The one accordingly came into communion with the Son of God, the other receive health from the Physician of Israel. Defiled Samaria is, in blessing, before righteous Judah.

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Here the first section of our Gospel closes. It has led us in the paths of the Son of God, the Son of the Father, along this evil world of ours. At the opening of it, we saw His glory, and found that the moment it shone out upon the world, it proved the darkness of the world. It met no answer from man. The world that was made by Him knew Him not. But He carried with Him a secret, the secret of the grace of God to sinners, deeper than all the thoughts of men. A stranger He was on the earth; but the revealing of His secret to poor sinners had virtue to make them strangers with Him.

## CHAPTERS V.—XII.

HAVING followed our Lord through chapters i.—iv. of this Gospel, I desire now, in God's grace, to track His further way ;—and may He, through the Spirit, make this work the occasion of holy and thankful delight !

In chapters v.—xii. we see our Lord in intercourse with the Jews. But to exhibit His public life and ministry, is not the purpose of the Spirit in this Gospel. He is not seen here, as in the other Gospels, going about the cities and villages of Israel preaching the kingdom, if haply they would repent ; but the departure from God of that world through which He was passing seems to be ever on His mind ; and He is seen coming forth, *only at times*, to act in power or in grace on all around Him, as the Son of God—the Stranger from heaven, the Saviour of sinners.

And so towards His disciples. They are not the companions of His ministry in this Gospel, as they are in the others. He does not appoint the twelve, and then the seventy ; but ministry is left in His own hand. The apostles are seen but little with Him till the 13th chapter, when His public ministry has closed. And when they are with Him, it is with some reserve. (See iv. 32 ; vi. 5 ; xi. 9.)

But, on the other hand, in no Gospel is He seen so near the sinner. He is *alone* with the Samaritan, *alone* with the adulteress, *alone* with the outcast beggar. And this gives its highest interest to this precious portion of the Word of God. The joy and security of being alone with the Son of God, as is here exhibited, is beyond everything to the soul. The sinner thus learns his title to the Saviour, and discovers the blessed

truth, that they were made for one another. The moment we learn that we are sinners, we may look in the face of the Son of God, and claim Him as our own. And what a moment in the very days of heaven that is ! He came to seek and to save sinners ; and He walked as a solitary man on the earth, save when He met a poor sinner. Such alone had title, or even power, to interrupt the solitudes of this heavenly Stranger. The world knew Him not. His paths were lonely among us, save when He and the sinner found their way to each other. The leper outside the camp met Him, but none else.

And let me say, this being alone with Jesus is the sinner's *first* position. It is the beginning of his joy ; and no one has a right to meddle with it. That which has called itself the Church, in every age of Christendom, has sought to break in upon the privacy of the Saviour and the sinner, and to make itself a party in the settlement of the question that there is between them. But in this, it has been an intruder. *Sin casts us upon God alone.*

And indeed, beloved, in the variety of judgment, now a days, it is needful to our peace to know this. Others may require of us to join them in particular lines of service, or in particular forms and order of worship ; and may count us disobedient if we do not. But however we may listen to them in those things, we dare not give up, in fear of them, God's prerogative to deal with us *as sinners* Himself alone. We must not surrender to any the right of God to talk with us *alone* about our sins. Nor should our anxiety on a thousand questions which may arise, righteous as that anxiety may be, be allowed to lead us for a moment to

forget, that as sinners we have been already alone with Jesus; and that He has once and for ever, in the riches of His grace, pardoned and accepted us.

This solitude of Christ and the sinner, our Gospel most comfortingly presents to us. But as to all others, Jesus is here but at a distance and in reserve. And so as to *places* as well as *persons*. The Son of God had nothing to do *especially* with any place;—the wide wilderness of the world, where sinners were to be found, was the only scene for Him.

But I will continue now to follow the chapters in order.

V.—I have already shewn from various instances, that there was, through all the stages of the history of Israel, the occasional putting forth of a special energy of the Spirit, by which, and not by the resources of their own system, the Lord was sustaining Israel, and teaching them to know where their final hope lay. From the call of Abraham to the throne of David we saw this.

Now I judge, that *Bethesda* was a witness of the same thing. Bethesda was not that which the system itself provided. It was opened in Jerusalem, as a fountain of healing, by the sovereign grace of Jehovah (as, indeed, its name imports). Neither was it an abiding, but only an occasional relief, as the judges and prophets, had been. Like them it was a testimony to the grace and power which were in God Himself for Israel, and had, perhaps, yielded this its testimony at certain seasons all through the dark age which had passed since the days of the last of their prophets. But it must now be set aside. Its waters are to be no more trou-

bled. He to whom all these witnesses of grace pointed had appeared. As the true fountain of health, the Son of God had now come to the daughter of Zion, and was shewing Himself to her.

It was a feast time, we are told (verse 1). All was going on at Jerusalem, as though all were right before God. The feasts were duly observed ; the time was one of exact religious services. But Bethesda alone might have told the daughter of Zion, that she needed a physician, and was not in that rest which faithfulness to Jehovah would have preserved to her. And the Lord would now tell her the same truth. He heals the impotent man, thus taking the place of Bethesda ; but He does so in a way that tells Israel of their loss of the Sabbath—the loss of their own proper glory. “The same day was the Sabbath.”

The nation is at once sensitive of this. It touched the place of their pride ; for the Sabbath was the sign of all their national distinction ; and they resent it—“they sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the Sabbath-day.”

But I must tarry a little longer here.

Jesus beside the Pool of Bethesda, as we see in this chapter, is a sight which, in the spirit of Moses, at the bush, we may well turn aside to see. If, of old, He had been reflected in that water, now He stands there to dry it up. He stands there as a new thing, in strong contrast with the Pool. “Wilt thou be made whole ?” was the word He addressed to the poor cripple that was lying there. Was he ready to put himself, just as he was, into His hand ? Was he willing to be His debtor ? Could he trust himself, in all his need and impotency, alone with Jesus ? This was all. And surely this was



in contrast with the weighty, cumbrous machinery of Bethesda. No rivalry need be feared, no help need be looked for, no delay need be endured, nor uncertainty felt. Those who might have struggled with this cripple to get down into the Pool before him, or those who might, in pity, have been drawn to help him down before others, he may now alike overlook ; and delay and hope may now be exchanged for a present and a full deliverance. Angels and the pool, helpers and rivals, delay and uncertainty, were now all blessedly and gloriously disposed of by Jesus in his behalf. When Jesus appeared, when the Son of God stood beside this Pool, the only question was, would the poor cripple be His debtor—stand by and see His salvation ?

The poverty of the Pool is exposed. It is seen to be nothing but a “beggarly element.” It has no glory by reason of the glory that excelleth. And after this same manner the Spirit, by the apostle, exposes “the worldly sanctuary,” and all its provisions and services, in the Epistle to the Hebrews. As I may say, Jesus is there standing again beside Bethesda. He is brought forth by the Holy Ghost in contrast with all that system of ordinances and observances which had gone before, and He exposes them all in their impotency and poverty. There had been, indeed, a reflection of Christ in those ceremonies of the old Tabernacle, as there had been in this water by the sheep-market ; but it disappears now, when the Light itself fills the place.

But as we tarry a little longer at this Pool, what are we to say, when we see, not only this cripple, but “a great multitude of impotent folk” lingering round that uncertain, disappointing water, though the Son of God was abroad in the land, carrying in Him and with Him

healing and deliverance without doubt or delay, and in defiance of all rivalry, and independent of all help ! Surely this reads us a lesson. The Pool thickly frequented, Jesus passing by unheeded ! The Pool sought unto, while Jesus has to seek, and to propose Himself ! What a witness of man's religion ! Ordinances, with all their cumbrous machinery, still waited on, the grace of God that brings salvation slighted !

We might marvel, did we not know, as from ourselves, some of the workings of this ruined nature of ours.

But further still. In the other Gospels, when the Lord is challenged for doing His works on the Sabbath-day, He answers, as from the case of David eating the shewbread, from the priests doing work in the temple, or from the fact that they themselves, His accusers, would lead out their ass to the watering on the Sabbath-day. But here, in John's Gospel, it is not what David, or the priests, or His accusers themselves would do, or had done, that He pleads, but what the heavenly Father had ever been doing in this needy, ruined world. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work," the Lord here says to those who were challenging this act of His at Bethesda, because it was the Sabbath.

Wondrous sentence ! and how fully in character with His way all through St. John. He does not here, as in the other Gospels on the like occasion, put Himself in company with David, with the priests, or with His neighbours, but with God ! "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."

This is full of consistent character with all that we get in this Gospel. And surely it is full, also, of that which may draw forth the joy and praise of those who know Him. With the Jews, however, it was otherwise.

These words again told them of their loss of the Sabbath in which they boasted ; yea, that they had long lost it, lost it from the beginning ; for that in every stage of their history, God had been working *in grace* among them, working as “ his Father,” of which this Bethesda was the sign ; and that He Himself had now come, just in the same way, to work in *grace* among them, of which this poor restored cripple was the sign. This was the voice of these words, “ My Father worketh hitherto, and I work ;” referring to the act of grace all through Israel’s history, which I have noticed. But on this, the Jews resent Him the more ; and not being in the secret of His glory, they charge Him with blasphemy, for calling God His Father.

To this He again answers (still, as before, speaking of Himself as Son, but taking a place of subjection also), “ Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of Himself.”\*

But all this is most blessed. One who came into this world on behalf of God and His honour, could take no other place. It was the only place of righteousness here. “ He that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and there is no unrighteousness in him.” Man had, through pride, dishonoured God. Man did an affront to the Majesty of God, when he listened to the words, “ ye shall be as God.” And the Son, who came to honour God, must humble Himself. Though in the form of God, He must empty Himself

\* Without the knowledge of the divine dignity of His person, we cannot discover the place which the Lord here takes, to be the place of *willing subjection*, as it was. For it would not have been such in any mere creature, however exalted, to have said, “ I can of mine own self do nothing.” But this in the Son was subjection.

here. God's praise, in a world that had departed from Him in pride, must have this sacrifice. And this sacrifice the Son offered. But this did not suit man ; this was not according to man ; and man could not receive or sanction such an one. " I am come in *my Father's name*, and ye receive me not ; if another shall come in *his own name*, him ye will receive."

This is a deep and holy matter, beloved. By His humiliation and subjection, the Son was at once honouring God, and testing man ; giving the "only Potentate" His due right in this world, but thus becoming Himself a sign for the making manifest the thoughts of the heart. And the Jew, the favoured Jew, was found in the common atheism of man ; for to disclose this hidden spring of unbelief *in Israel*, our Lord's discourse in this chapter was tending. It was not for want of light and testimony. They had the works of Christ, the Father's voice, their own scriptures, and the testimony of John. But withal, they had the love of the world in them, and not the love of God ; and were thus unprepared for the Son of God.

"How can ye believe, who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only" (ver. 44). Surely this has a voice for our ears, beloved ! Does it not tell us, that the heart and its hidden motions have to be watched ? "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of *it* are the issues of life." There may be strong and dangerous currents running under the surface. Job was a godly man. None like him in his generation. But in his soul there was flowing a rapid current. He valued his character and his circumstances. Not that he was, in the common way, either self-righteous or worldly. He was

truly a believer, and a generous friend and benefactor. But he valued his circumstances in life, and his estimation among men. In the hidden exercises of his heart, he was wont to survey his goodly condition with complacency (ch. xxix.). That was a strong under-current. His neighbours had not traced the course of that stream; but his heavenly Father had; and because He loved him, and would have him partaker of His holiness, with which all this was inconsistent, He put him into His own school to exercise him.

What a gracious warning does this afford us, to keep the ebblings and flowings of the heart under watch. "What are we thinking of?" we may ask ourselves again and again through the day. Whereon are we spending our diligence? What are the secret calculations of our minds in moments of relaxation? Is it the spirit or the flesh that is providing food for us? Do our affections which stir within, savour of heaven or of hell?

These are healthful inquiries for us, and suggested by the strong moral thought of the Lord here, "how can ye believe, which receive honour one of another."

How could man, apostate in pride, brook the lowly Son of man, the emptied Son of God? This was the source where their unbelief took its rise. There was no association between them and the One who stood for God's honour before men. His form of humiliation was now disallowed, as His work and grace at Bethesda had before been refused. His brethren should have understood, how that God by his hand would deliver them; but they understood not; they believed not Moses, and were thus, in principle, still in Egypt, still

in the flesh, still unredeemed. Had they believed Moses they would have believed Christ, and been led out by Him, as at this time, from under the hand of Pharaoh, the power of the flesh and the world. But under all that, through unbelief, this chapter finds them and leaves them.

VI.—A new scene opens here—it was the passover : but God's mercy, which that season celebrated, Israel had slighted. They had still to learn the lesson of Egypt and the wilderness ; and in patient love, after so many provocations, the Lord would even now teach them.

Accordingly, He feeds the multitude in a desert place ; thus shewing the grace and power of Him, who for forty years had fed their fathers in another desert. The disciples, like Moses, wonder through unbelief, and say, as it were, “ shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them to suffice them ? ” But His hand is not shortened. He feeds them ; and this awakens zeal in the multitude, and they would fain come, and by force make Him a king. But the Lord would not take the kingdom from zeal like this. This could not be the source of the kingdom of the Son of Man. The beasts may take their kingdoms from the winds striving upon the great sea, but Jesus cannot (Dan. vii. 25). This was not His mother crowning Him in the day of His espousals (Cant. iii.). This was not, in His ear, the shouting of the people bringing in the head-stone of the corner ; nor the symptom of His people made willing in the day of His power. This would have been an appointment to the throne of Israel, on scarcely better principles than those on which Saul had been appointed



of old. His kingdom would have been the fruit of a heated desire of the people, as Saul's had been the fruit of their revolted heart. But this could not be. And beside this, ere the Lord could take His seat on Mount Zion, He must ascend the solitary mount; and ere the people could enter the kingdom, they must go down to the stormy sea. And these things we see reflected here, as in a glass. The Lord is seen on high for awhile, and they are buffeting the winds and the waves; but in due season He descends from His elevation, makes the storm a calm, and brings them to their desired haven. And so it will be by and bye. He will come down in the power of the heaven to which He has now ascended, for the deliverance of His afflicted ones; then shall they see His wonders, as in the deep, and praise Him for His goodness, for the works that He doeth for the children of men (Ps. cvii. 23—32.)\*

The Lord, therefore, has only to retire from all this popular awakening in his favour. How must the mind of the heavenly Stranger have felt entire dissociation from it all! He retires from it; and on the following day, enters on other work altogether. He opens the mystery of the true passover, and the manna of the wilderness, which they had still to learn. They had still to learn the virtue of the Cross, the true Passover which delivers from Egypt, from the bondage of the flesh, from the judgment of the law; enabling the sinner to say, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live." The wages of sin is death; and sin in

\* In the corresponding places in Matthew and Mark, we read that the Lord goes to the mountain to *pray*. But that is not noticed here. Indeed the Lord is not shown by St. John in prayer (save in chap. xvii. and that is rather intercession); and all this is still in the full character of our Gospel.

the Cross had its wages. Death had its sway ; and the law can return to the throne of God with its own vindication ; for it has executed its commission : Christ has died, and died for us. This is the true Passover—the power of redemption ; in the grace of which, we leave Egypt, or the place of bondage, and come forth with the Son of God into the wilderness, there to feed on manna, there to live by every word that has proceeded out of the mouth of God.

And though thus in some sense distinct, the Lord in this discourse seems to combine the mysteries of the Passover and the manna. It was in the time of the Passover that He thus preached to them on the manna. For both pertained to the same Israel, the same life. The Paschal blood was upon the lintels for redemption, while the Lamb was fed upon within the house. The Israelite was in *living* communion with that which gave him *security*. And this was the beginning of life to him ; in the strength of which he came forth to feed on the manna in the wilderness.

But Israel, as we here find, had not as yet so come forth out of the bondage of Egypt into God's pastures in the wilderness. They prove that as yet they knew not this life ; that as yet they had never really kept the Passover, or fed on the manna. They murmured at Him. Their thoughts were too full of Moses : " He gave them bread from heaven to eat," said they. But ere they could indeed eat of the manna, they must fall into the paths of love, into thoughts of the Father, and not of Moses. For it is love that leads us to the Cross. Moses never gave that bread. The law never spread the feast. It is love that does that ; and love must be apprehended, as we sit at it. And this is the reason

why so few guests are there ; for man has hard thoughts of God, and proud thoughts of himself. But to keep the feast, we must have happy thoughts of God, and humblest self-renouncing thoughts of ourselves. Communion with the Father and with the Son, on the ground of salvation, communion with God in love, is life.

But Israel was not in this communion. They “go back,” they thrust Him from them, and in their hearts turn back again into Egypt : their carcasses fall in the wilderness, and a remnant only feed on “the words of eternal life,” and live—a remnant who look round on all as a barren waste yielding no bread without Him, as “a dry and thirsty land” from one end to the other, save for the Rock that follows them ; and they say : “to whom shall we go ?”

And whence this remnant ? “According to the election of Grace,” as the Lord here further teaches, shewing us the acts of *the Father* in the mystery of our life, that it is He who gives to the Son, and draws to the Son, all who come to Him ; that His teachings and drawings are the hidden channels through which this life is reaching us. “Lord, to whom shall we go ? thou hast the words of eternal life ; and we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.” This is the faith and utterance of that elect remnant, who, coming out of Egypt, live by faith on the Son of God ; but only in the Son of God as *crucified*. For our life lies in His death, and through the faith which feeds on that death. No acceptance of Christ but as *crucified* avails for life. It is not His virtues, His instructions, His example, or the like, but His death (His flesh and blood), that must be fed

upon. His death accomplished, singly and alone, what all together and beside never did and never could. The blessed Lord died ; gave up the ghost, or surrendered the life which He had, and which none had title to take from Him. But the moment that was done, results broke forth which all His previous life had never produced. It was then, but not till then, that the vail of the Temple was rent, the rocks were riven, the graves opened. Heaven, earth, and hell, felt a power they had never owned before. The life of Jesus, His charities to man, His subjection to God, the savour of His spotless human nature, the holiness of that which had been born of the Virgin, none of these, nor all of them together, nor everything in Him and about Him, by Him or through Him, short of the surrender of life, would ever have rent the vail or broken up the graves. God would still have been at a distance, hell been still unconquered, and He that has the power of death still undestroyed. The blood of the dear Son has done what all beside never did, never could do. And over Him thus preached and set forth, it is still to be said, "he that hath the Son hath life."

This leads me to pause for a little over a subject connected with our life, of which this chapter treats ; I mean the eating of blood. Here our Lord commands us to eat blood, even His own blood ; but under the law blood was forbidden. Under the law all slain beasts were to be brought to the door of the Tabernacle, and their blood offered upon the altar, and by no means to be eaten. (Lev. xvii.) This was a confession, that the life had reverted to God, and was not in man's power. To eat blood under the law would have been

an attempt to regain life in our own strength—an attempt by man to reach that which he had forfeited. But now, under the Gospel, the ordinance is changed. Blood must be eaten—"Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, there is no life in you." For the life that had reverted to God, God has given to make atonement. The blood of the New Testament has been shed for the remission of sins, and life, through that blood, is now given to sinners in the Son of God. "In Him was life." He came from God with the life for us. "He that hath the Son hath life." And we are commanded, as well as besought, to take life from Him. And truly we may say, our God has thus perfected our comfort and our assurance before Him, making it to be as simple disobedience in us not to take life from Him as His gift, as it would be simple pride and arrogance of heart to assume to take it by our own works. What a pleading of love is this with our souls! We are disobedient if we are not saved! Death is God's enemy as well as ours; and if we do not take life from the Son, we join the enemy of God. "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life," says the aggrieved Son of God. And when asked by certain persons in this very chapter, "What shall we do that we may work the works of God?" He has but to reply, "this is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." To believe, and take life as the gift of God through His Son, is the only act of obedience that the blessed God claims from a sinner—the only thing that a sinner, till he is reconciled, can do to please Him.

This is grace wondrously and blessedly revealed. This ordinance that forbade the eating of blood, was as

the flaming sword of the cherubim in the Garden. Both that sword and this ordinance told the sinner that there was no recovery of forfeited life by any effort of his own. And Adam's faith most sweetly displays itself here. He did not seek to put back that sword, as though he could regain the tree of life himself. But what did he? He took life from God, through grace, and the gift by grace. He believed the promise about the woman's seed; and in that faith, called the woman "the mother of all *living*." He took life as the gift of God through Christ, and sought it not by works of the law, or through the flaming sword.

All this mystery in the sinner's life was thus illustrated from the very beginning, even in the faith of Adam; and is blessedly unfolded in our Lord's discourse to the people in this chapter. That life begins in the power of redemption by the paschal Lamb slain in Egypt, and by the manna of the wilderness. But our chapter shows us that Israel was still a stranger to it; that they had not learnt the lesson of Egypt and the wilderness, in the knowledge of the redemption and life that is in Christ Jesus.

VII.—A new scene again opens here. It was the time of the Feast of Tabernacles; as the preceding scene had been laid in the time of the Passover.

This was the most joyous season in the Jewish year. It was the great annual festival at Jerusalem; the grand commemoration of Israel's past sojourn in the wilderness, and of their present rest in Canaan; the type also of Messiah's coming glory and joy as King of Israel. His brethren urge the Lord to take advantage of this season; to leave Galilee and go up to Jerusa-

lem, there to exhibit His power and get Himself a name in the world. But they did not understand Him. They were of the world; He was not of the world. The Son of God was a Stranger here; but they were at home. *They* might go up and meet the world at the Feast, but *He* was for God against the world. He, to whom it bore witness, could not go up and claim His own there, because the world was there, because the god of this world had usurped and was corrupting the scene of His glory and joy.

But how fallen was Israel when this was so! And what was their boasted festival, when the spring of its joy and the heir of its glory must thus stand estranged from it!

The gold had become dim. The ways to Zion were still solitary; none were *really* coming to the solemn feasts. In spirit the prophet was still weeping (Lam. i. 4). The Lord goes up, it is true, but not in His glory. He does not go as His brethren would have had Him; but in obedience merely, to take the place of the *humbled* and not of the *great* one of the earth. And when arrived at the city of solemnities, we see Him only in the same character, for He goes to the temple and teaches: but when this attracts notice, He hides Himself, saying, "My doctrine is not mine, but His that sent me." He hides Himself, that not He, but the Father who had sent Him, might be seen. Like the one who had emptied Himself and taken the form of a servant, He is willing to be nothing. They who were at the feast manifested their utter apostasy from the principle of the feast, and say, "how knoweth this man letters, *having never learnt?*" In their pride, they acknowledged no source of knowledge or wisdom



above man. They would have the creature in honour: but the feast celebrated Jehovah, and was for the setting forth the honours of Him, who now in righteousness had to hide His glory, and separate Himself from it all. Israel and the feast, Israel and the Son of God, were utterly dissociated. They had nothing in each other. And thus, whether we listen to the Jews, or to the men of Jerusalem, or to the Pharisees, in this chapter, all tell us of their rejection of Him; and He has in the end, to say to them, "where I am, thither ye cannot come."

Jesus, thus, refuses to sanction the feast. He tells Israel that they had now no title to the rest and glory which it pledged to them—that they were not really in Canaan, and had never yet drawn water out of the wells of salvation; that their land, instead of being watered by the river of God, was but a barren and thirsty portion of the accursed earth; that they had forsaken the fountain of living waters, and all their own cisterns were but broken. And accordingly, as the feast was closing, Jesus puts the living water into other vessels, and dries up the wells which were in Jerusalem. He turns the fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwelt therein, and opens the river of God in other places. "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink: he that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."

And in connection with this, I would shortly trace "the river of God" through Scripture; and we shall see it flowing in different channels according to different dispensations.

In Eden it took its rise in the earth to water the garden, and from thence to wander in divers streams over the earth. For the dispensation was one of earthly good. Man knew no source of blessing or streams of joy, than such as were connected with creation. In the wilderness the smitten rock was its source, and every path of the camp of God its channel. It followed them ; for at that time they only were the redeemed of the Lord, whom His eye rested on in the world. In Canaan, afterwards, the waters of Shiloah flowed softly ; Jehovah watered the land from His own buckets, and made it to drink of the rain of heaven ; and for the souls of the people, every feast and every sacrifice was as a well of this water ; and the current of the yearly service of the sanctuary was its constant channel. For Israel was, then, the people of the Lord, and their land His dwelling place. But the time had now come, as we have just seen, for leaving Canaan a dry land, and for opening the river of God elsewhere. It was now to take its rise, as the Lord here teaches us, in the glorified Son of Man in heaven ; and the channels, through which it was to flow, were to be the bellies of His members on earth. The dispensation was to be one of “ spiritual blessings in heavenly places ; ” the earth was not for the present to be watered, but only the Church of God. But, by and bye, in the kingdom, when the present age, like others, has fulfilled its course, and other dispensations arise, this same river will own other channels and springs. It will rise in the throne of God and the Lamb, and flow through the golden street of the city, for the gladdening of the multitude before the throne (Rev. vii. 17 ; xxii. 1, 2) : and it will also rise under the sanctuary in the earthly

Zion, for the watering of Jerusalem and the whole earth. (Ezek. xlvii.; Joel iii.; Zech. xiv.) For then will be the time of the two-fold blessing, the time of the heavenly and the earthly glory. All things will have the grace and power of God dispensed among them, all will then be visited by "the river of God which is full of water." The feast of tabernacles will then be duly kept in Jerusalem, and that nation of the earth which will not go up to keep it there, shall have no gracious visitation of this fruitful river, but shall be left to know the sterility of that soul that refuses to drink of the water which the Son of God giveth.

Upon all this, I would only further notice the connection that there is between *our thirst* and *the outflow of this living water*. (See verses 37, 38.) The saint thirsts, then goes to Jesus for the water that He has to give, and afterwards comes with the river of God, the water of life, the flowing of the Spirit, in him, for his own refreshing and that of the weary. His thirst receives the abounding presence of the Holy Ghost, and opens in him a channel for the river of life, which now rises in the ascended Head of the Church, to flow through Him to others. O that we panted more after God, as the hart pants after the water-brooks! that we longed more for the courts of the Lord! Then would the Spirit fill our souls, and we should comfort and refresh one another. And this is indeed the power of all ministry. Ministry is but the outflowing of this living water, the expression of this hidden abounding presence of the Spirit within us. The Head has received the gifts for us; and from the Head, all the body, by joints and bands having nourishment ministered and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. And

this is our only Feast of Tabernacles, till we celebrate a still happier one round the throne. For this Feast cannot now be kept in Jerusalem ; the saints must have it in its own present form, by walking together in the liberty and refreshing of the Holy Ghost.

This Feast, this "joy in the Holy Ghost," is something more than either the passover of Egypt, or the manna of the wilderness. Those were for redemption and life, but this is for joy and the foretaste of glory ; those were of the flesh and blood of the Son of Man, broken and shed here ; but this of the Son of Man glorified in heaven. It savours of Canaan, though for comfort in the wilderness ; as the Feast of Tabernacles was a Feast in Canaan, the land of rest and glory after the wilderness.

But Israel, as yet, knew nothing of these things, as is here shewn to us. In the fifth chapter, the Lord had met them, *as in Egypt*, with redeeming grace and power : witness the restored cripple ; which was like Moses casting down his rod in the sight of Israel in proof of his embassy. But it only ended in proving that they would remain in Egypt ; for they refuse to believe Moses, believing not Him of whom Moses wrote ; and what redemption from Egypt was there for Israel, if Moses were refused ? In the sixth He had met them, *as in the wilderness*, with the manna ; but only, in like manner, to prove that they were not feeding there, as the camp of God, upon the bread of God. In this chapter He had met them *as in Canaan* ; but all had shewn that Canaan was still the land of the uncircumcised, the land of drought and not of the river of God. He, therefore, now stands outside of the city of solemnities, and in spirit ascends to heaven, as

Head of His body the Church, to feed the thirsty from thence. He says, "if any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." The Jews may reason about Him among themselves, and then go every man "to his own house;" but He, owning His present estrangement from Israel, and consequent homeless condition on the earth, goes to the Mount of Olives.

VIII.—Thus was it with Israel now. They knew not that they were still in bonds, and needed His hand to lead them out, and feed them again. They knew not that they had still to reach the true Canaan, Immanuel's land. They had been rejecting *the grace* of the Son of God, and were making their boast of *the law*; and now, in the confidence that it was theirs, and that they could use it, and by it entangle the Lord, they bring forward the adulteress.

They had, to be sure, noticed His grace to sinners. All His ways must have told them that. And they judge it, of course, an easy matter to shew Him to be the enemy of Moses and the law. But He gains a holy and glorious victory. Grace is made to shout a triumph over sin, and the sinner over every accuser. The Lord does not impugn the law. He could not; for it was holy; and He had come not to destroy, but to fulfil it. He does not acquit the guilty. He could not; for He had come into the world with full certainty as to the sinner's guilt. It was that which had brought Him among us. And, therefore, in the present case, He does not pretend to raise such questions. The sinner is convicted, and the law righteously lies against her. But who can execute it? Who can cast the stone? That question He may and does raise. Satan may accuse, the sinner may be guilty,

and the law may condemn : but where is the executioner ? Who can handle the fiery power of the law ? None but Himself. None can avenge the quarrel of divine righteousness upon the sinner ; none have hands clean enough to take up the stone and cast it but Jesus Himself ; and He refuses. He refuses to act. He refuses to entertain the case. He stooped down and wrote on the ground as though He heard them not. He was not presiding in any court for the trying of such matters. He came not to judge. But they persist. And then the Lord, in effect, replies, that if they will have Mount Sinai, they shall,—if, like Israel of old, they will challenge the law, and undertake the terms of the fiery hill, why, they shall have the law, and again hear the voice of that hill. And, accordingly, He lets out something of the genuine heat of that place ; and they soon find that it reaches them as well as the poor convicted one ; and the place becomes too hot for them.

They had not reckoned on this. They had not thought that the thunders of that hill would have made them to quake, or its horrible darkness have inwrapped them as completely as the open and shamed sinner whom their own hand had dragged there. But as they had chosen the fiery hill, they must take it for better or worse, and just as they find it.

The Lord, however, in giving the law this character, in causing it to reach the judges as well as their prisoner, proved that He was the Lord of that hill. He let, as I said, some of its genuine heat out. He marshalled its thunder and directed its lightning, and spread out its horrible darkness, as the Lord of it. He

made the hosts of that hill take their march, and address themselves to their proper work. And then, on this being done, exactly as of old at the same place, this is found to be intolerable. "Let not God speak to us," said Israel then (Ex. xx.); as now these Pharisees, "being convicted by their own conscience, go out one by one." They can no more stand under that place which they themselves had challenged than Israel of old, when that mount let them know what it really was.

All this has a very great character in it. The Lord is greatly glorified. They designed to expose Him as Moses' enemy, but He displays Himself as Moses' Lord, or the conductor of that lightning which had once made the heart of himself, that stoutest Israelite, exceedingly to fear and quake.

I read all this as something very excellent indeed.

But further. If this be His glory, it is equally our blessing. If the Lord Jesus be honoured as the conductor of the fiery power of the law, we find that He does this for us. He lets this poor sinner know this. While the Pharisees accuse her He is deaf to all they were saying; and when they still urge Him, He gives her to see Him turning the hot thunderbolt on the head of her accusers, so that they are forced to leave her alone with Him, who had proved Himself *the Lord of Sinai* and *her deliverer*.

Could she desire more? Could she leave the place where she now found herself? Impossible. She was as able to stand it as the very Lord of the hill Himself. Sinai had no more terror for her than for Him. Need she leave that place? She was free to do so, if she pleased. They who had forced her there were gone.



The passage was open. She had nothing to do but to go out after the rest, if she desired it. If she would fain hide her shame, and make the best of her case, she may. Now is the time. Let her go out. The Lord knows her sin in all its magnitude, and she need not think of remaining where she is and be accounted guiltless. If this be her hope, let her follow her convicted accusers, and hide her shame outside. But no. She had learnt the tale of delivering grace from the words and the acts of Jesus, and she need not go out. Nature would have retired. Flesh and blood, or the mere moral principles of man, would have sent her after the rest. But the faith which had read the story of redemption, acts above nature, or the judgment of the moral man. She remains where she was. This mount Sinai (as her accusers had made that place) was not too much for her. The still small voice of mercy, which once answered Moses and again answered Elijah there, had now answered her. The pledges of salvation were there exposed to her as of old time to the fathers, and the spot was green and fresh and sunny to her spirit. It had become "the gate of heaven" to her. The shadow of death had been turned into "the light of life." She need not go—she would not go—she could not go. She will not leave the presence of Jesus, who had so gloriously approved Himself the Lord of Sinai and yet her deliverer. She was a sinner. Yes—and she knew it, and He knew it, before whom in solitude she now stood. And so was Adam, as he came forth naked from the trees of the garden. But she is willing and able to stand naked or detected before Him. She could no more retire to a thicket than Adam could continue in a thicket, or wear his apron of fig-leaves,

after such a voice. Jesus had confounded all her accusers. They had roared of the evil she had done, but He had deeply and for ever silenced them. In the light of life she now walked. Her conscience, in a little moment, had taken a long and eventful journey. She had passed from the region of darkness and death into the realms of liberty, safety, and joy, led by the light of the Lord of life.

This is the triumph of grace ; and this is the joy of the sinner. This is the song of victory on the banks of the Red Sea, the enemy lying dead on its shores. She has but to call Him "Lord ;" and He has but to say, "neither do I condemn thee ; go and sin no more."

This was full deliverance. And the same deliverance awaits every sinner who, like the poor adulteress here, will come and be *alone* with Jesus. As *sinner*s (as I have observed before), *we have to do only with God*. We may do offence or wrong to others, and they may complain and challenge us. But, as sinners, God must deal with us alone ; and the discovery of this is the way of blessing. David discovered it, and got blessing at once. His act, it is true, had been a wrong to another. He had taken the poor man's one little ewe lamb. But he had in all this sinned against God also. And in the discovery and sense of this he says, "*I have sinned against the Lord*." But the effect of this was to leave him *alone* with God. As a *wrong-doer*, Uriah might have to do with him ; but as a *sinner*, he had not. God must deal with him ; and the moment his sin thus casts him alone with God, he, like the poor adulteress here, listens to the voice of mercy : "The Lord hath put away thy sin ; thou shalt not

die." He suffers chastening for the *wrong* he had done, but *the wages of sin* are remitted.

It is ever the sinner's victory when he can thus by faith claim to be alone with Jesus. The priest and the Levite have then passed by ; for what could *they* do ? What art or ability had the Law to meet the sinner's case ? It is grace—the Stranger from heaven—that must help. The poor wounded sinner is lying in the way, and the good Samaritan must meet him. And truly blessed is it, when all through its further way, the soul still remembers how it thus began in solitude with Jesus the Saviour.

And He is glorified in all this as surely as we are comforted ; glorified with His brightest glory, His glory as the Saviour of the guilty. A vial is prepared for redeemed sinners, which is to bear an incense, the like to which can be found nowhere else (Ex. xxx. 37). Even the vials of angels do not carry such perfume. They praise the Lamb, it is true ; but not in such lofty strains as the Church of redeemed sinners. They *ascribe* to Him "power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing ;" but the Church has *a song* before the throne, and sings, "Thou art worthy, for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation."

All this blessing for the sinner, and this glory for the Saviour, we see here. The sinner is hid from her accuser, and the Saviour silences him. The officers had been lately disarmed by the holy attraction of His words, and now the Scribes are rebuked by the convicting light of His words (vii. 46 ; viii. 9). These were not carnal weapons, but weapons of heavenly

temper. Their enmity had exhausted all its resources. They had essayed the force of the lion and the guile of the serpent ; and, all having passed, the Son of God at once takes His elevation, and shews Himself in His place of entire separation and distance from them. He raises the pillar of light and darkness in the present wilderness of Canaan, and puts Israel, like the Egyptians of old, on the dark side of it. "I am the light of the world," says Jesus ; "he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness."

Such was Israel now, spiritually called Egypt. They had no association with Abraham, or with God, though they boasted in them ; for they had no faculty to discern Abraham's joy, or the Sent of God. They must take their place of atheistic darkness and alienation. The Lord gives them the place of Ishmael, the very place which St. Paul afterwards puts them in (see v. 35 ; Gal. iv.). As the child of the bondwoman, Israel still is, and will be, till "they turn to the Lord," till "they know the truth, and the truth make them free,"—make them as Isaac. The Jews assert that they had never been in bondage (v. 33). Jesus might have called for a penny, and by its image and superscription have proved their falsehood. But according to the high and divine thoughts of this Gospel, He takes other ground with them, and convicts them of deadlier bondage than that to Rome, a bondage to flesh and to sin.

Mark also their low and mistaken thoughts about Him and His plainest words. He had said "*Abraham rejoiced to see my day ;*" but they reply as though He had said, *He had seen Abraham*. The difference, however, was infinite, though they perceived it not.

By the words He had used, the Lord was challenging the highest glories for Himself. He was making Himself the great object from the beginning, the One who had been filling the thoughts, engaging the hopes, and answering the need, of all the elect of God in all ages. It was not He that had seen Abraham, but it was Abraham that had seen Him; and, without contradiction, I may say, the better is seen of the less. "Look unto Me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." That is Christ's place. He was Adam's object, as he went forth from Eden. He was the confidence of Abel and of Noah. He was seen and rejoiced in by Abraham and the patriarchs. He was the substance of the shadows, and the end of the law. He was the Lamb and the Light under the eye of the Baptist. He is now the confidence of every saved sinner; and He will be, through eternity, the praise and the centre of the creation of God.

All this is a strong discovery of the state of Israel through this chapter. And this was a solemn moment for them. In Matthew the Lord tested the Jews by His Messiahship, and in the end convicted them of rejecting Him in that character. But in this Gospel He tests them by other and higher proposals of Himself: as the light, the truth, the doer of the works and the speaker of the words of God, as the Son of the Father; and, thus, convicts them not of mere unbelief in Messiah, but of the common atheism of man. In this character Israel is here made to stand, Cain-like, in the land of Nod, in the place of the common departure of man from God. He had spoken the words of the Father, but they understood not, they believed not. As the Sent of *the Father*, He had come (as such

an one must have come) *in grace* to them, but they refused Him. And so is it among men of this day. The Gospel is a message of goodness ; but man receives it not. *Man will not think well of God.* This is the secret of unbelief. The Gospel is “goodness” (Rom. xi. 22) ; and man still asks, *Is it from God ?*—for man has hard thoughts of God, and Satan is persuading him still to have them. He does what he can to obscure the sinner’s title to God, that the sinner may look for some inheritance elsewhere.

So here with Israel. Jesus *judged* no man, but spake the word of *the Father*, which was freedom and life to them. But they understood not His speech, as He says to them. Their minds were formed by their father, who was a liar and a murderer ; and “grace and truth,” which came to them by Jesus Christ, they had no ears to hear. And now, as the disallowed witness of the Father, as the hated light of the world, He has no place in the land, no certain paths of this earth to go forth into. He “passes by” as knowing no spot or person here, but still, as the light of the world, shining, wherever His beams may reach, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

IX., X.—Accordingly, in this character, He is separated from Israel. Israel is left in darkness, and the pillar of God moves onward. Jesus, the “light of the world,” goes forth and meets one who had been blind from his birth ; and in such an one His works could well be manifested.

The Lord God, it is most true, is a great king, and acts as a sovereign. He is the potter that has power over the clay. But the Son came not from the throne

of the king, but from the bosom of the Father. He came to manifest *the Father*. The blind may be in the world, but the Son came only as the light of the world : and accordingly, as such alone, He applies Himself to His blessed labour of grace and power, and opens the eyes of this blind beggar.

But what was this to Jerusalem? There was darkness there ; and the light may shine, but it will not be comprehended. Instead of that, as we read here, “ they brought to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind.” There was a high court of inquisition at Jerusalem, and it must try the ways of the Son of God. Instead of welcoming Him as of old, when the pillar of God was raised, and saying, “ Rise, Lord, let thine enemies be scattered,” they love their own darkness, and will walk in it.

At first they question the man himself. But not finding him quite to their purpose, they commit the case to witnesses who, they judge, were in their own power. They call his parents. But again they fail. The fact that the light had shone among them cannot be gainsayed. They then seek to divert the whole matter into such a channel as would leave untouched their own pride and worldliness ; and they say, “ Give God the glory ; we know that this man is a sinner.” But this will not do, either. The poor soul maintains his integrity ; and then, they alarm him by separating him from all acknowledged ground of safety. “ Thou art his disciple,” say they, “ but we are Moses’ disciples.” But he is kept still ; and not only kept, but led on from strength to strength. He hath, and more is given him. He follows as the light leads, till at length it so shines, as to reprove the darkness of



the Pharisees ; and they hurl against him the thunders of the Church, and cast him forth without the camp.

But where do they cast him ? Just where every lonely outcast sinner may find himself,—where the unclean Samaritan and convicted adulteress had before found themselves,—into the presence, and across the solitudes, of the Son of God ; and that is the very gate of heaven. For the Lord had gone without the camp before him. This sheep of the flock was now “put forth ;” but it was only to meet the Shepherd, who had “gone before.” In that place of shame and exposure they embrace each other. “There was he found by one who had himself been shot by the archers.” The meeting there was a meeting indeed. This poor Israelite, while he was within the camp, had met Jesus as his healer ; but now that he is put without, he meets Him as the Son of God. He meets Him to know Him as the One who, when he was blind, had opened his eyes, and now that he is cast out, talks with him. And, beloved, this is ever the way of our meeting Jesus, as sinners and as outcasts, in the unclean place. If He take us up there, it must be in the *full grace* of the Son of God, the Saviour. And thus our character as sinners leads us into the sweetest and dearest intimacies of the Lord of life and glory. As creatures we know the strength of His hand, His Godhead, and wisdom, and goodness ; but as sinners we know the love of His heart, and all the treasures of His grace and glory.

And I notice the changed tone of this poor beggar. In the presence of the Pharisees he was firm and unbending. He does not abate the tone of conscious righteousness and truth, all through. He set his face

as a flint and endured hardness. But the moment he comes into the presence of the Lord, he is all humility and gentleness. He melts, as it were, at the feet of Jesus. Oh, what a sweet sample is this of the workmanship of the Spirit of God ! Courage before man, but the meltings of love and the bowings of worship before the Lord who has loved and redeemed us.

But this unclean place without the camp, where the Lord of heaven and earth now stood with this poor sinner, was not only the place of liberty and joy to the sinner, but the wide field of observation to the Lord. From this place He surveys Himself, the beggar, and the whole camp of Israel, outside of which He had gone with His elect one ; and in the parable of the "good Shepherd," He draws the moral of it all. In the scene of the ninth chapter He had shewn that He had entered by the door into the sheepfold ; for He had come working the works of the Father, and had, in that way, approved Himself to be in the confidence of the Owner of the fold, the sanctioned Shepherd of His flock. He was estranged from Israel ; but, like Moses in such a case, He was to keep the flock of His Father in other pastures, near the mount of God. The Pharisees, because they were resisting Him, must therefore needs be "thieves and robbers," climbing into the fold some other way. And the poor blind beggar was a sample of the flock, who, while they refuse the voice of strangers, hear and know the voice of Him that had entered by the door ; and, entering by Him, "the door of the sheep," find safety, rest, and pasture.

All this had been set out in the scene before us, and is expressed in the parable. The parable thus passes a blessed commentary on the present condition of this

poor outcast. The Jews, no doubt, judged (and would have had him judge so likewise) that he had now been cut off from safety, being cut off from themselves. But Jesus shows that not until now was he in safety ; that had he been left where he was, he would have become a prey to those who were stealing, and killing, and destroying ; but that now he was found and taken up of One who, to give him life, would lay down His own.\*

All this we have, both in the narrative and in the parable. And it is at this point in our Gospel that the Lord and the remnant meet together ; “ the poor of the flock ” are here manifested, their own shepherds pitying them not ; and the Shepherd from heaven takes them up as all His care, to guard and to feed them (Zech. xi.).

But the love and care of Him who said to Him, “ feed the flock of slaughter ” (Zech. xi. 4), is also seen here most blessedly. It is, perhaps, the sweetest thing in the parable. We learn the mind of *the Father* towards the flock. For the Lord says, “ as the Father knoweth me, so know I the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep ; ” letting us know that one of the deepest secrets of the Father’s heart was His love and care for the sheep. The flock, indeed, was the Father’s before it was committed to Christ, the Shepherd. “ Thine they were and Thou gavest them me.” They

\* I may just notice how it was that this poor weak one of God broke the snare of the fowler. We see in his ways two things : first, his honest, faithful, following the light, as it was given to him, and as it shone in him brighter and brighter ; secondly, his simple pleading of the works and ways of Jesus, his deliverer and friend, in answer to all the suggestions of the enemy. This was his security ; and this is ours, too, whether we be *pressed* or *entangled* by Satan.

lay in the Father's hand before they were put into Christ's hand. They were the Father's *by election* before the world was, and became Christ's by the gift of the Father, and by purchase of blood. And all the tenderness and diligent care of *the Shepherd* do but express the mind of the *Owner* towards His flock. The Shepherd and the Owner of the flock are one. As the Lord says, "I and my Father are one." One, it is true, in glory, but one also in their love and carefulness about their poor flock of redeemed sinners. Christ met the Father's mind when He loved the Church and gave Himself for it ; and they rest for ever one in that love, as surely as they rest one in their own glory. This is truth of precious comfort to us. "Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." We learn, indeed, that God is love ; and the moment we discover this we get our rest in God ; for the wearied broken heart of the sinner may rest in love, though nowhere else. "God is love ; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."

Here, then, "the poor of the flock" feed and lie down. But Beauty and Bands are to be broken. The shepherd's staves that would have led and kept Israel must now be cast away. It was only a remnant that knew His voice. Who can hear the voice of a Saviour but a sinner? The whole need not the physician. And thus, in this place, our Lord's dealings with Israel close. He refuses to feed them any more : "That that dieth, let it die ; and that that is to be cut off, let it be cut off" (Zech. xi. 9).

And I may notice that His dealing with Israel closes here in a way fully characteristic of this Gospel by John. They seek to stone Him, as we read, because

that "He, being a man, had made himself God." In the other Gospels the soul of Israel loathes Him (as Zechariah speaks) for other reasons ; because, for instance, He received sinners, or impugned their traditions, or touched their Sabbath. But in this Gospel it is His assertion of Sonship of the Father, the assertion of the divine honours of His person, which chiefly raises the conflict (see chapters v., viii., x.). In this place we observe that the Lord, in answer to the Jews, pleads the manifestation which he had now given of Himself, as others had done in Israel before Him. Others, set in authority, had been called "gods," because they had manifested *God* in His place of *authority and judgment*, and were the powers whom *God* had ordained. And He, in like manner, had now manifested the *Father*. The judges and kings could have shewn that the word of *God* had come to them, committing to them the sword of *God*. And Jesus had shewn Himself the Sent of *the Father*, full of *grace and truth*, working among them now as *the Father* had hitherto worked, in the exercise of grace, restoring, and healing, and blessing poor sinners. Thus had He shewn that the Father was in Him and He in the Father. But their hearts were hardened. The darkness could not comprehend the light, and He has but to escape out of their hands, and take up again a position in the earth apart from the revolted nation.\*

\* See ii. 13 ; vi. 4 ; vii. 2 ; xi. 55. In this Gospel I observe that the feasts are called "Feasts of the Jews," as though the Spirit of God looked at them as something now estranged from His mind. This is highly characteristic of this Gospel, in which, as I have noticed, the Spirit is separated from Jewish recollections, because He is tracing the way of the Son of God, the Son of the Father, who stands above Jewish connection. Similar to this, in

Here the second section of our Gospel ends. It has presented to us our Lord's controversies with the Jews, in the course of which He set aside one Jewish thing after another, and brought in Himself in the place of it. In the 5th chapter He set aside Bethesda, the last witness of the Father's working in Israel, and took its place, as minister of grace. In the 6th and 7th chapters He set aside the feasts ; the passover and the tabernacles (the first of which opened the Jewish year with the *life* of the nation, while the second closed it with their *glory*) taking the place of these ordinances Himself, shewing that *He* was the only source of *life* and *glory*. In the 8th, after exposing the utter unsuitableness of the law to man, because of the evil and weakness of man, He takes His place as "the light of the world," as the One by whom alone, and not by the law, sinners were to find their way into truth and liberty, and home to God. And then, in the 9th chapter, in this character of the light of the world, He goes out from Israel. He had been casting His beams on that people, but they comprehended Him not. He goes forth, therefore, and draws the poor of the flock after Him ; and in the 10th exhibits Himself and them outside the camp, leaving the land of Israel, as the prophet had spoken, a chaos without form and void. The Word of the Lord, that would have called it into beauty and order was refused ; and now, the place of Jehovah's ancient husbandry, on which His eyes rested from one end of the year to the other, and which He

the Old Testament, Horeb or Sinai is called "the Mount of God ;" but in the New, under St. Paul's hand, it is called "Mount Sinai in Arabia ;" the Spirit of God no longer owning it, but leaving it simply to its earthly description.

watered with the rain of His own heavens, is given over to become the wilderness and the shadow of death.

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XI., XII.—Thus was it with Israel. They were left in unbelief and darkness, having refused the proposals of the Son of God. But these chapters shew that though Israel may delay their mercy, they shall not disappoint it. God's purpose is to bless, and He will bless. In the way of His own covenant, that is, in resurrection power and grace, He will bring the blessing to Israel. It was as the quickener of the dead He had of old entered into covenant with their father Abraham. It was thus that He appeared to Moses, as the hope of the nation at Horeb (Ex. iii. ; Luke xx. 37). It was by resurrection that He was to give to Israel the promised prophet, like unto Moses (Deut. xviii. ; Acts iii.). It is in this character that all the prophets speak of Him, as acting for the seed of Abraham in the latter day. And our own apostle tells us that the resurrection of Jesus is the pledge of all the blessing promised to the fathers (Acts xiii. 33). Jehovah will restore life and glory to Israel, in resurrection power and grace. When all their own strength is gone, He will Himself arise for their help. He will plant glory in the land of the living. The barren woman shall keep house. The Lord will call them from their graves, and make the dry bones live. And that He will accomplish all this for Israel is here, in these two chapters, pledged and foreshewn. The previous chapters had shewn Israel to be in ruins, and distance from God ; but here, ere the Lord entirely hides Himself from them, He gives them, in the raising



of Lazarus and its results, full pledges of final life and glory.

This, I doubt not, is the general bearing of these two chapters ; and thus they form a kind of appendix to the previous section, rather than a distinct portion of the Gospel.

The Lord had left Judea, and was in retirement beyond Jordan, when a message came to Him that one (*in Judea*) whom He loved was sick. He abides in the place where He was till this sickness had taken its course and ended in death. Then He addresses Himself to His journey, for He could then take it as the Son of God, the quickener of the dead ; and in the full consciousness that He was about to act as such, He sets forward, saying, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth ; but I go that I may awake him out of sleep."

But here let me turn aside for a little.

The words of the two sisters in the progress of this chapter seem to convey a rebuke to the Lord for His thus tarrying :—"Lord, if thou hadst been here my brother had not died." But in this they were not wise. They were not in the divine secret, the secret of the Son of God. He had come into this world now, as of old He had gone to the house of Abraham, as a quickener of the dead. He was bringing victorious life with Him. He must be displayed in *that* glory. This had been done, since sin had entered and brought in death. But nature is not equal to this great mystery. Faith receives it and talks of it, but faith is of the operation of God. And so, when Peter owned this life in Jesus, confessing Him the Christ, the Son of the living God, it was told him that the Father had revealed that to

him (Matt. xvi.). None in this chapter were equal to it. They all talk of death and not of life, even Martha and Mary themselves. But Jesus has life in Him and before Him. "I am the resurrection and the life," He says; "he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and he that liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

It is life, thus qualified, that the Son imparts to us—life eternal, infallible, victorious—and faith apprehends, receives, and enjoys it. "He that has the Son has life." Peter, as we said, had it revealed to him by the Father (Matt. xvi.); Jesus took knowledge of it as in Himself (John ii. 19; viii. 51; xi. 25); the empty sepulchre displayed and celebrated it (John xx.); the risen Christ imparted it (John xx.). It is undefilable, as it is eternal or victorious (John iii. 9). Death cannot reach it, the gates of hell prevail not against it.

What a story of life in a world where sin has reigned unto death! What glory to God! what effectual relief and consolation to us! It is life won from death, life brought in by the putting away of sin through the inestimably precious sacrifice of the Lamb, the Son of God, of Him "who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God!" What a mystery! "Take heed, then, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from *the living God*" (Heb. iii. 12).\*

\* Let me just notice the tears of Jesus here. The consciousness that He carried resurrection-virtue in Him, and was about to fill the house at Bethany with the joy of restored life, did not stay the current of natural affection. "Jesus wept." His heart was till alive to the sorrow, as to the degradation, of death. His calmness throughout this exquisite scene was not *indifference*, but

But we must leave this precious, wondrous theme. The Lord, here in our chapter, also consciously bore the *day* as well as the *life* with Him ; for “the life is the light of men ;”—and thus He says also, in answer to the fears of His disciples, “are there not twelve hours in the day ? If any man walk in the day he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world.” He not only *saw* the light, but He *was* the light, of the world—not merely a child of light, but the fountain of light. His disciples, however, are dull of hearing. They neither discern the voice of the Son of God, nor see the path of the light of life. They judge that death to Himself, rather than life to others, was before Him, and they say, “let us also go that we may die with him.” There might have been human affection in this, but there was sad ignorance of His glory. The disciples now, like the women afterwards, would fain take their spices to the Saviour’s tomb ; but both should have known that He was not there.

Onward He goes, the Son of God, the quickener of the dead ; and His path lies to the grave of Lazarus, His friend, in Judea. There He stands, in the full vision of the triumphs of sin ; for “sin hath reigned unto death ;” and, had all ended here, Satan had prevailed. Jesus wept. The Son of the living God wept over the vision of death. In another Gospel He had wept as the Son of David over the city which He had chosen to put His name there, because she had refused Him. But here, as the Son of God, who had life in Himself, He weeps over the vision of death. But He

*elevation.* His soul was in the sunshine of those deathless regions which lay far away and beyond the tomb of Lazarus, but He could visit that valley of tears, and weep there with them that wept.

groaned in Himself also ; and He that searcheth the hearts knew that groan ; and Jesus, in full assurance that it was heard, had only to acknowledge the answer with thanksgiving, and, in the power of that answer, to say, “ Lazarus, come forth ;”—and he that was dead did come forth, the witness that “as the Father hath life in Himself, so had He given to the Son to have life in Himself.”

Here did the path of *the Son of God* end. He had met the power of sin at its height, and had shewn that He was above it—the resurrection and the life. But this was not the destruction of him that had the power of death ; for it was not the death and resurrection of the Captain of salvation Himself. Nor was it properly a pledge to the saints of their resurrection in *glorious bodies* ; for Lazarus came forth bound hand and foot with grave-clothes, to walk again in flesh and blood. It was rather a pledge to *Israel* of the quickening power of the Son of God on their behalf ; shewing them that the promised resurrection or revival of the nation rested on Him, and that He would in due time accomplish it.\*

\* I would notice the paths of Martha and Mary in this scene. Martha, in the bustle of the flesh (for she was careful about many things), goes out to meet the Lord, on hearing that He was coming. But she does not really meet Him. He was above her. He was standing in the consciousness of a glory that she as yet could not apprehend, and He speaks from His elevation, “I am the resurrection and the life ;” while she answers from hers, “I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Thus there was a distance between them, the sense of which becomes painful to her, and she goes her way. There was then, I judge, a whisper in her soul that her more heavenly-minded and better instructed sister would understand the Lord better than she did ; and under this suggestion she went and told Mary that the Master had come, and called for her. This, I believe, was the secret of Martha’s

But Israel had no eyes to read this sign of their mercy, nor heart to understand it. Instead of its becoming the ground of their faith, it is made the occasion of the working of full enmity. "From that day forth they took counsel together to put him to death." The husbandmen set themselves to cast out the heir of the vineyard. And their entire departure from their father Abraham, their complete apostacy from God, is manifested. Israel had been separated out of the nations unto God ; but they now deliberate, and take their place among the nations again. Unlike Abraham, they take riches from the king of Sodom, instead of blessing from the hand of Melchisedek. They choose the patronage of Rome rather than know the resurrection power of the Son of God. "If we let him thus alone," say they, "all will believe on him, and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation." And the judgment then comes upon them, "hear ye indeed, but understand not, and

word to her sister. It was not that the Lord had really called for Mary, and much less was Martha the bearer wrongfully of a false report. But Martha's heart suggested that there was a sympathy between the Lord and Mary ; and this suggestion, without wrong, expressed itself thus : "The Master is come, and calleth for thee." And so it proved. Mary goes forth to meet her Lord, and really meets Him. There is not the same distance between them as there had been between the Lord and Martha. Mary, on meeting Him, falls at His feet ; and He, on seeing her, groans in spirit. This was a meeting indeed, a meeting between the Lord of life and His worshipper. Mary does not, like Martha, multiply words without knowledge ; nor has the Lord to rebuke any slowness of heart in her, as He had in Martha. But we know He loved them both ; and blessed is it to have any living fellowship with Him. Some may have more burning thoughts and brighter views of Him than others ; but though our measure be but the Martha measure, yet there is heaven in the fellowship, wherever it is true and living.

see ye indeed, but perceive not." For now, having the voice of the Spirit in their High Priest, there is no ear to hear it aright; and having the doings of the Son of God among them, there is no eye to perceive Him aright.

But still He was the quickener of Israel; and in the latter day the dry bones shall hear the word of the Lord and live; of which, as I have observed, Lazarus is the pledge. And the Remnant in Israel in that day is also illustrated in the family at Bethany.\* Into the midst of this well loved family the Lord comes, and finds refreshment, and fellowship, and the acknowledgment of His glory; as He will find these things in His Remnant in the latter day. There He sits as the "Lord of life," the witness of His quickening power being seated beside Him; and there too He sits as "the King of glory," the homage of His willing people being laid at His feet. In these two holy dignities is He now received by this faithful household. "While the King sitteth at his table," says Mary, "my spike-nard sendeth forth the smell thereof" (Cant. i. 12).

It is thus He here sits; one family in the apostate land owning Him Lord of life and King of glory. But

\* But in this house at Bethany we see also the church, there being so much of moral kindredness between the two. For the church is the witness of Christ's resurrection-power during the long age of Israel's unbelief, and before the remnant is manifested. And in the church, also, during that age, the Lord finds His only refreshment and fellowship. In *Martha serving*, *Lazarus sitting*, and *Mary anointing the feet*, we see the saints in their various grace and characters of communion with the Lord: some waiting on Him in the activities of love; some resting beside Him in the calm certainty of His favour, hearing His voice and learning His ways; some pouring forth the fulness of their loving and worshipping hearts.

the city itself and the strangers there were soon to see Him as well as this house at Bethany; as, by and by, the nation and the whole earth will own Him after the Remnant.

Accordingly, "on the next day," as we read, much people, moved by the report of His having raised Lazarus from the dead, meet Him on His coming to Jerusalem, and lead Him into the royal city, as the Son of David, the king of Israel.\* The time was the time of the Passover; but the people are moved as with the joy of the Feast of Tabernacles, and take branches of palm-trees to gladden their King. And the nations, as it were, come up to keep the feast also; for certain Greeks come to Philip, and say, "Sir, we would see Jesus." *Glory shines for a moment in the land of the living.* Here was Lazarus raised from the dead, the city receiving her King, and the nations worshipping there. The great materials of the kingdom in which He is to be glorified had now passed before the Lord. The joy of Jerusalem and the gathering of the nations He had now witnessed; but His soul was full of the holy certainty that death awaits all here, however promising or pleasurable; and that honour and prosperity must be hoped for only in other and brighter regions. In the midst of all this festive scene, Jesus Himself sits solitary. His spirit muses on death, while the thoughts of all around Him are full of a kingdom, with its attendant honours and joys. "Verily, verily, I say unto you," is His word now, "except a corn of

\* The Lord does not send for the ass's colt here, as He is shewn to do in the other Gospels. Here the scene of the entry into the city is produced by the zeal of the people. This distinction is still characteristic—for this Gospel does not give the Lord in Jewish connection, as I have observed.



wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone." *Resurrection was everything to Him.* It was His relief amid the sorrows of life, as we saw in chapter xi.; it is His object amid the prospects and promises of the world, as we now see in chapter xii. It gave His soul a calm sunshine, when dark and heavy clouds had gathered over Bethany; it moderates and separates His affections, when the brilliant glare of a festive day was lighting up the way from thence to Jerusalem. The thought of resurrection thus sanctified His mind amid griefs and enjoyments around Him. *Resurrection was everything to Him.* It made Him a perfect exemplar of that fine principle, "let him that weepeth be as if he wept not, and he that rejoiceth as though he rejoiced not."

How little of this elevation above the conditions and circumstances of life, the heart of some of us is acquainted with!

This season was really to be *the Passover*, and not *the Tabernacles* to Jesus; and His soul passes, for another moment, through His paschal trouble. But the Father again acknowledges Him. He had glorified Him as Son of God, quickener of the dead, at the grave of Lazarus; and now He glorifies Him as Son of Man, Judge of the world and of the prince of the world, by the voice from heaven.

And here did His path as *the Son of Man* end, as His path as the Son of God had before ended at the grave of Lazarus. The Son of God and Son of Man had now been fully displayed before His unbelieving Israel. He was glorified among them, as the Prince of life, and the holder of all authority and power. The things now accomplished and displayed in these two

chapters, were the fulfilling of His words to them at the beginning: these were the "greater works" at which they should "marvel" (chap. v. 20, 22). They had now witnessed His quickening power as Son of God, and had His judicial glory as Son of Man pledged to them by the voice from heaven. They should have honoured Him as they honoured the Father. But instead of this they were soon to kill Him. They were soon to disown the Lord of life and the King of glory, on whom all their hopes of life and the kingdom hung. He had tested them by the promised "greater works;" but there was no response from Israel. The harvest was past, the summer ended, and they were not saved. The lamentation of the prophet was now to be uttered, "who hath believed our report?" It was not that His works had not manifested Him as the hope of Israel. Many even of the chief rulers felt and owned them in their consciences, as we here read. But they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God, as He had said unto them (v. 44; xii. 43). All that remained was judgment on Israel, and the heavenly glory of this earth-rejected Jesus (40, 41). So does our Evangelist himself tell us, drawing the awful moral of the whole scene—"He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart, that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias, when he saw His glory and spake of Him." All closed in judgment upon Israel, and in glory, heavenly glory, glory within the veil, for the blessed Jesus (Isa. vi. 1, 2).

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Thus our Gospel seats the Son of God in heaven

again. His way ends there, as it had begun there. The Gospel by Matthew ushers Him forth as the Son of David from Bethlehem, and closes with Him (as far as His ministry was concerned) on the Mount of Olives. (Matt. i.; xxiv.) But this Gospel opened with His descent from the bosom of the Father, and here closes (as far as His ministry is concerned) by His return to heaven. There He still dwells in the high and holy place, and the humble and broken-hearted are there with Him. He speaks from heaven; and His voice must be in the power of all that finished work which has taken Him there. He has forced His way into the holiest, through the outer courts, throwing down all enmities, all middle walls and partitions, and has again come forth from thence, in the virtue of His blood, and in the power of the Holy Ghost, to preach peace to all (Eph. ii. 12—22). He cannot but speak of all that is there, and not of what is here. He cannot but speak, by His Spirit, of the peace and gladness and glory which are there, and not of the accusings with which our sins still committed here would fill our hearts.

All through His divine ministry in this Gospel, as I have before observed, the Lord had been acting in grace, "as the Son of the Father," and as "the light of the world." His presence was "day-time" in the land of Israel. He had been shining there, if haply the darkness might comprehend Him. And here, at the close of that ministry (xii. 35, 36), we see Him still as the light casting forth His last beams upon the land and people. He can but shine, whether they will comprehend Him or not. While His presence is there, it is still day-time. The night cannot come till He is

gone. "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." But here, "He departs and hides Himself;" and then, God, by His prophet, brings the night upon the land (ver. 40). It was not that the light had imperfectly shone. Their own consciences told them otherwise (v. 42, 43). The light had done its service and ruled the day, but the darkness had not comprehended it; and then, this ruler of the day sets in Judea, *only to rise in other spheres*. For His cry in these closing verses (44—50) is not addressed to Israel merely, but to the whole earth. It is but the same "light of the world," which had lately run His race in Judea, coming forth out of His chamber to run a longer race. And this race He is running still. "The *day* of Salvation" is still with us. The night of judgment on the Gentiles has not yet come. We may still walk without stumbling; we may still know whither we are going. The light still says, "Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." Such are Thy ways, blessed Saviour, Lamb of God, Son of the Father!

## CHAPTERS XIII.—XVII.

I HAVE followed the Lord through chapters i.—xii., of this Gospel, noticing His ways as the Son of God, the Stranger from heaven, the Saviour of sinners; and also His intercourses and controversies with Israel. The one was a path of grace, but of loneliness—the other lay much in the track of the prophet Jeremiah. Like Jeremiah, the Lord had witnessed the backslidings of the daughter of Zion. Like him, He had warned her, and taught her, and would fain have healed her. But, like him, He had seen the stubbornness of her heart, had suffered rebuke and rejection from her, and had now only to weep for her. He had, as in the words of Jeremiah, said to her, even to the end of His ministry (see chap. xii. 35), “give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains; and, while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness. But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride.” (Jer. xiii. 16.)

Jesus had thus wept over Jerusalem, for she had not repented. The Boar had now again left his woods to devour her; the “Destroyer of the Gentiles” was again on his way, as in the prophet’s day. The captivity in Babylon had no more purged away the dross of Zion, than the waters of Noah had sanctified the earth; and all was again ripe for another judgment. But, as in the midst of all this, Jeremiah of old had his Baruch, the companion of his temptations (Jer. xxxvi. and xliii.), to whom from the Lord he pledges present life (chap. xlv.), and with whom he deposits the sure evidence of final inheritance (chap. xxxii.), so now, Jesus has His

saints, the companions of His rejection, to whom He gives the present certainty of life, and the sure promise of future rest and honour.

With these we now get our Lord in secret. We have now done with His public ministry: and we have Him now with His own, telling them, as their Prophet, the secrets of God.

And being about to listen to Him as the Prophet of the Church, I would observe, that what the Lord gives us as *our Prophet*, is our *present* riches. It is not with us, as with Israel of old, “blessings of the basket and of the store,” nor is it with us now, as it will be by and by, “authority over cities,”—but “we have the mind of Christ.” Treasures of wisdom and knowledge hid in Christ are our *present* treasures (Col. ii. 2). And accordingly, having now turned away from Israel towards His elect, and looking at them apart from the world, He makes known to them all things that He had heard of the Father. By and by, as the King of glory, He will share His dominion with the saints; but now, He has only the tongue of the learned for them, that He may teach them the secrets of God. It is only as their Prophet, that He now enriches them. As to other riches, they may count themselves poor, as one of them of old said (and said it, beloved, without shame), “silver and gold have I none.”

Our Lord Jesus is the Prophet like unto Moses who had been promised of old. God saw Moses face to face. He spake with him, as a man speaketh unto his friend, saying of him, “with him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold.” In all this high prerogative, Moses was the

shadow of the Son of God. Moses had access to God. He was on the heights of the hill with Him, beyond the region of thunder and tempest; then, within the cloud of glory, as it stood at the door of the temporary tabernacle; and lastly, in the very holy of holies, when the tabernacle itself was reared. (Ex. xxiv.; xxxiii.; xxv. 22.) And he stood in all that nearness to God, whenever he pleased, and without blood—though even Aaron, we know, could be there only once a year, and that not without blood—all this telling us, in affecting and intelligible language, of the divine personal worthiness of our prophet—of the God-head glory of Him, whose shadow Moses was, who was then in the bosom of the Father, and has now spoken to us. (Heb. i. 1, 2.)

And what Moses learnt on the top of the hill, or within the cloud of glory, or from off the Mercy Seat in the holiest, was the secret which the Son has now brought out from the bosom of the Father. Moses learnt there the *grace* of God, and saw “the glory of goodness.” (Ex. xxxiii. 19.) Blessed vision! And the only begotten Son was among us, “full of grace and truth.”

But the services which the Lord renders us as our Prophet are various; and in this variety, we shall find the special character of this Gospel by John fully maintained.

In the opening of Matthew, the Lord, as a Prophet, revealed the mind of God touching the conduct of His people, interpreting the law in its extent and purity, thus determining the divine standard, and applying it to the conscience. He prescribed the order and ways of the saints, so as to make them worthy of the re-



generation and the kingdom, calling the soul into exercise towards God, and giving it its due ends and objects. (See Matt. v.—vii.) But in our Gospel, He is the Prophet in a higher character. He declares “the Father,” and reveals the “heavenly” things. He speaks as the One who had “ascended into heaven,” and was “from above.” (John iii. 13, 31.) It is not so much *our conduct* as *God’s thoughts*, that He tells us of. He tells us of the mysteries of life and judgment; He declares the love of the Father, the works and glories of the Son, and the place and actings of the Holy Ghost, in and for the Church of God. He is, in this Gospel, the Prophet of the secrets of the Father’s bosom, disclosing the hidden ways of the Sanctuary. He speaks as the Word, who was “with God, and was God,” giving us such knowledge as a mere walk on the earth in righteousness and service would not have needed, but such as makes us nothing less than “friends” (John xv. 15), and gives us communion, in knowledge, with the ways of “the Father of glory.” (Eph. i. 17.)

Such is the variousness of the Lord’s exercise of His prophetic office; and such, I judge, the peculiar exercise of it in this Gospel, the exercise of it in its *highest* department, again making the Gospel so peculiarly precious to the saint. And when the gathering of the Church in this present “day of salvation” is over, and *all* have come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, we shall not lose our Lord as our Prophet. We shall listen to Him as such, even in the kingdom. His lessons will feed us for ever. Solomon was a *prophet*, as well as a *priest* and a *king*. His servants stood continually

before him, and all kings of the earth sought his presence to hear him. The Queen of Sheba came to prove him with hard questions, and he answered her in all her desire. When she beheld all his ways, the *king's* magnificence, the *priest's* ascent to the house of God, and the *prophet's* wisdom, these were altogether more than a match for her heart—the half had not been told her—“there was no more spirit in her.” And so, in the coming kingdom, we shall have that which shall fill the eye with glory, give the heart its satisfied affections, ever feed the still enlarging thoughts of our minds with the treasures of wisdom that are hid in our divine Prophet, and withal give our ears the music of His praise for ever.

But let me say, for my own admonition as for my brethren, that we should constantly suspect and dread all mere effort of mind, while listening to the words of our Prophet, that is, while reading the Scriptures. The Spirit is a *ready* Teacher, as well as a *ready* Writer; and the light of the Spirit, though it may shine at times, through our darkness, but dimly, yet will it always evidence itself with more or less certainty. And let us remember also, that it is a *Temple* light—a light that suits the Sanctuary. It was in the holy place that the candlestick stood; and the intelligence that is awakened in the soul by the Holy Ghost, is attended by the spirit of devotion and communion. It is a *Temple* light still.

I have already noticed the Lord's different exercise of His prophetic office, in Matthew's Gospel and in this. In His discourses with His elect, after His public ministry is over, as given us by these two Evangelists, the same characteristic difference is still to be clearly discerned. In Matthew, He talks with them on the

*Mount of Olives* about *Jewish* matters (xxiv., xxv.); but here, He leads them in spirit, into *heaven*, to open to them the sanctuary there, and to tell them of *heavenly* secrets (xiii.—xvii.). The Lord takes His seat, not on the Mount of Olives, to tell His Remnant of Israel's sorrows and final rest, but in heaven, to disclose to His saints the actings of their High Priest there, and their own peculiar sorrows and blessings as the Church of God, during the age of that heavenly Priesthood. The heavenly Priesthood is the great subject throughout these chapters, on which I would now somewhat more particularly meditate. They form one section of our Gospel; but I will consider them in distinct portions, as their contents seem to me to suggest.

XIII.—Here, at the opening, the Lord's action, *washing the disciples' feet*, is an exhibition of one great branch of His heavenly service.

The washing of the feet was among the duties of hospitality. The Lord rebukes the neglect of it in His host in Luke vii. (See 1 Tim. v. 10.) It conveyed two benefits to the guest, I may say—it cleansed the traveller after the soiling of the journey, and refreshed him after the fatigue of it.

Abraham, Lot, Laban, Joseph, and the old man of Gibeah, are eminent among those who observed this duty (Gen. xviii., xix., xxiv., xliii.; Judg. xix). And the Son of God, as receiving into the heavenly house, would give His elect the full sense of their welcome and their fitness, that they might take their place, with happy confidence, in any department of that royal sanctuary. It was a sanctuary, it is true. But this

washing fitted them for such a place. The Son of God was doing for the disciples the duty and service of the Brazen Laver towards the priests, the sons of Aaron, in the Tabernacle (Ex. xxx.). He was taking on Himself the charge of having them fit for the Divine presence. It is the common way of every well-ordered family, that the servants keep themselves clean, or leave the house. But such is the grace of the Son of God, the Master of the heavenly house, that He charges Himself with the duty of keeping the household in even priestly sanctification and honour.

“Unfathomable wonder, and mystery divine!” All we need is the spirit of a simple unquestioning faith which rests in the reality of such surpassing grace.

But His service for us in the sanctuary, as the High Priest of our profession, His cleansing of our feet as the true Laver of God’s house, Jesus did not enter on, till He had accomplished His passion on earth, and ascended into the heavens; and, thus, it was not, as we read here, till “after the supper was ended,” that He took a towel and girded Himself to wash His disciples’ feet. For the “supper” was the exhibition of His passion and death, as He had said, “take, eat, this is my body.” And, accordingly, He seems to go through the whole of this mystic scene, in the consciousness that He had now finished His sufferings, had ascended, and was looking back on His saints; for it is introduced in these words, “having loved his own *which were in the world*”—words that suggest the apprehension He had of His saints being still in the world, while He had left them for higher and holier regions. And in the sense of all this, though glorified again in and with the Father, as the gracious servant

of their need and infirmities, He girds Himself with a towel and washes their feet ; giving them to know, that He was abiding in the heavenly sanctuary, just to impart to them the constant virtue of the "holiness" which, as their High Priest, He ever carried for them on His forehead before the throne of God.\* (Ex. xxviii.)

Thus, there is a difference between the mystic import of "the supper," and of this subsequent "washing of the feet ;" and the difference is the same as between "the day of atonement" and "the ashes of the Red Heifer," under the law. The day of atonement, like the supper, set forth the virtue of *the blood* of the Son of God, the ashes of the heifer, like this washing, the virtue of His *intercession*. The day of atonement was but one day in the Jewish year, a great annual day of reconciliation, on which the sin of Israel was put away once for all ; the ashes of the heifer were provided for every day's transgressions, for all the occasional defilements which any Israelite might contract, while passing through the year. So, with the blood-shedding first, and the priestly intercessions of the Son of God afterwards : as a scripture says, "for if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the *death* of His Son, much more being reconciled we shall be saved by His *life*."

And we have the same blessings in the same order in another form, viz.—*the paschal Lamb* once and for

\* The supper is not noticed in this Gospel, save by inference. And this is in beautiful keeping with its general character ; for it is, as we have already seen, the Gospel of *the Son*, rather than of the *humiliation of Jesus*. And, therefore, we get Him, as in this chapter, in His priesthood, but we do not see Him in His passion, as at the supper.

ever redeemed Israel out of Egypt, but in the wilderness, it was *the intercession of Moses* that turned away wrath from the occasional trespasses of the camp. And so, the blood of Jesus our Passover, and the intercession of Jesus our Mediator—the *supper* first, and then the *washing of the feet*, the *death* here, and then the *life* in heaven for us. He that is once washed in the blood, needeth not save to wash his feet; and that washing of his feet, that removal of the soil which the saint gathers in his walk along this earth day by day, the High Priest who is in heaven for him accomplishes by His presence and intercession there. He is the *Mediator* of the new covenant, as well as the *Blood* of it.

Thus, the love of the Son of God for the Church, as it had been *from* everlasting, so must it be *to* everlasting; as it is here written, “having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them *unto the end*.” Every age and scene must witness the same love in some of its services, and in its abiding fervour and truth. No change of time could affect it. The dreariness of this world and the glories of heaven found it in His heart the same. Neither sorrow nor joy, suffering nor glory, could touch it for a moment. His death here, and His life in heaven, alike declare it. Nay much more. He had served her in this love before the world was, when He said, “Lo, I come!”—and in the kingdom after the world, He will serve her still in the same love, making His saints to sit down to meat, while He waits on their joy (Luke xii. 47).

Such *was* the Lord, such *is* the Lord, and such *will be* the Lord, in His unceasing service of love towards His saints; and He tells them to be His imitators. “If I, then, your Lord and Master, have washed your

feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet." He expects to see, among us on earth, the copy of that which He is doing for us in heaven. He is there daily washing our feet, bearing our need and meeting our defilements before the throne; and He would have us daily washing one another's feet, bearing one another's infirmities, and helping one another's joy, here on the footstool.

This action and teaching of the Lord was, thus, a taking of the church, like Moses before, up into the Mount to shew her the patterns, according to which the things on earth were to be made. Moses then stood above the law, beyond the region of fire and tempest, and so the church here. The disciples are called up in spirit into the heavenly sanctuary, and there shewn the ways of the High Priest in His daily love and care of them; and they are told to go down and do likewise. As was said to Moses, "see thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the Mount." The time for the taking of Moses into the Mount to *abide there* had not then come. He was only to visit it, that he might see the patterns, and receive orders. And so here. The church was not yet ready for the glory and for the Father's house. "Whither I go," says the Lord to the disciples, "thither ye cannot come." They shall follow afterwards as He further promises; but for the present, there was to be only a sight of the patterns on the mount, that they might copy them on the earth. But *love* alone can fashion those copies, for *love* is the artificer of the originals in heaven. As the Lord again says, "by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have *love* one to another." It is not, as of old, the skill of



such as "work in brass" that will do now, but the skill of such as "walk in love." The fashioning of any kind thought in the heart toward a brother, the arming of the mind with power to bear and forbear in love, the goings forth of the soul in sympathies, and the moulding off or softening down of any hard or selfish affection; these are the copies of the heavenly patterns. It is only as "dear children" we can be "imitators of God" (Eph. v. 1). And what comfort is this! When the Lord would appoint on earth the witness of His own ways in heaven, He tells us to love one another, to wash one another's feet! What a sight of Him, though within the vail, does this give us! "He shews his thoughts how kind they be." What manner of daily occupation of our Priest in His sanctuary on high is here disclosed to us!

And, beloved, let me admonish myself and you to seek to walk more amid these witnesses of the Lord than we do. For this would be our assurance before Him, and our joy among ourselves. If our ways were steady unwavering ways of love, we should be ever walking in the midst of the shadows and emblems of Christ; we should have the Lord's thoughts in all their kindness and constancy ever before us; and what joy and assurance would that give us! No suspicions of His love, no cloudings of doubt and fear, could then gather on the soul, but we should hear Him with our ears, and see Him with our eyes, and handle Him with our hands; for all that ear, or eye, or hand met from one another would witness, as well as savour, of His love. This, indeed, would be a sweet dwelling "in the house of the Lord," a blessed beholding of "the beauty of the Lord." But all this display of glorious love the

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poor heart of man is not prepared for. Peter expresses this common ignorance. He does not yet understand this connection between *glory* and *service*. He follows his human thoughts, and says, "Thou shalt never wash my feet." But Peter was to know all this by and by, as his Lord promises, for Peter and his Lord were one. But Judas must be separated. "I speak not of you all," said the Lord. The presence of the traitor in the midst of the saints up to this solemn moment was needed; for the scripture had said, "he that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me." Judas must receive the sop from the Lord's own hand. The pledge of love must be given and despised ere Satan could enter; for it is the rejection of love that matures the sin of man, as the remaining unmoved by this signal mark of kindness from the hand of his Master, perfected the sin of Judas; and Satan entered. Satan's indwelling is not noticed till the sop was received—as man, in this dispensation of ours, has despised love, and thus matured his sin—as the Lord afterwards said, "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin" (xv. 24). But having now despised the love of the Gospel, man has "gone his way;" as Judas here, having received the sop, "went out" to betray Him who had given it. And our evangelist adds—"It was night." Solemn words! Night *in* man and night *for* Jesus.

But He at once looks beyond this night; for dark as it was to be to Him, it was to open into the perfect day. Jesus would be glorified in God *at once*, for God was glorified in Him; the only son of man in whom He ever was glorified. He had kept the nature with-

out spot, and was now about to present it to God a sheaf of untainted human fruit fitted for God's garner. Man in Jesus had been glorified, for all that had proceeded from Him, all that had been drawn out of Him, was according to God (xiv. 30, 31). Not one speck sullied the moral beauty there. Man in Jesus had not come short of the glory of God. And God, who had thus been glorified in Him, would therefore glorify Him in Himself. But as to all beside, it was altogether otherwise. Jesus could go *at once* to God, by virtue of all this moral glory; but as to all beside, it matters not, whether saints or unbelievers, whether Peters or Pharisees, there could not be this. A place with God must be *prepared*, ere even the saints could be gathered into it (xiv. 1); and, therefore, the Lord says to them, "Ye shall seek *Me*, and as I said *unto the Jews*, whither I go ye cannot come, so now I say *to you*."

This day of His own glory in God, Jesus here anticipates, saying, as soon as the traitor was gone out, "now is the Son of Man glorified."\* And so, by and by, there will be room again for the display of the glory, when the Son of Man shall have gathered out of His kingdom all things that offend, and all that do iniquity; when the traitor shall again "go out," then shall the glory be witnessed, and the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. The floor once purged, the sheaves of glory will be gathered into the garner.

\* I would notice the assurance of heart which the consciousness of love at all times gives us. Peter and John are not at all alarmed at the Lord's solemn hints about the traitor; they take counsel together to search and find out the meaning of those hints, and who it was that should do this thing. Could our hearts so stand, beloved, before the searchings and discernings of the Spirit of judgment? Conscious love is bold as a lion.

XIV.—XVI.—Having thus passed, in spirit, through the night, and taken His place in the day that lay beyond it, the Lord turns to His disciples, and in these chapters, as the Prophet of the heavenly things, instructs and comforts them, telling them of the mystery of His own heavenly Priesthood, and of their calling and duties and blessings as the Church of God still sojourning on earth during that Priesthood.

The Priesthood of the Son of God, or the present dispensation, during which He is on the Father's throne, and we "in the kingdom of God's dear Son," was a secret with God hid from the thoughts of Israel altogether. "The little while" was a stage in the divine procedure, of which both the Jews and the disciples were equally ignorant (John vii. 36; xvi. 17). They had all thought that Christ was to abide for ever (chap. xii. 34); for their prophets had spoken of Him in connection with earthly dominion. There were, however, many intimations, both from prophecy and from history, which might have prepared them for this. Joseph's residence and glory in Egypt, and during that time his forgetfulness of his kindred in Canaan till stress of famine brought them to him, had typified this mystery.—So had Moses' sojourn in Midian (See Acts vii.) We may judge, no doubt, that both Joseph and Moses had constant recollections of their own people, and many a desire toward them, while separated from them—but it was an *untold* desire. So we know that the Lord is now mindful of Jerusalem, her walls are continually before Him, engraven on the palms of His hand. But apparently He is to them as a man astonished, as a mighty man that cannot save.

And beside those typical histories, the prophets had

spoken directly of this mystery. They had foretold Jerusalem's *widowhood*, which was to continue for a season. Moses at the beginning had left a standing testimony with Israel, that the Lord for a time would hide His face from them, and provoke them to jealousy by those who were "no people" (Deut. xxxii.). David had said that Messiah, as his Lord, should for a while sit at the right hand of God (Ps. cx.). Isaiah had a vision of Christ in the heavenly glory, during a season of judgment on Israel (Is. vi.). Ezekiel saw the glory leave the city, and then *after a season*, return to it. And the Lord had said, by Hosea, "I will go and return unto my place, till they acknowledge their offence and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early." In His own ministry, the Lord Jesus had already referred to the same mystery. In St. Matthew, He corrects the thought that Christ was to abide for ever, by a recital of those Scriptures which spoke of the rejection of the Stone by the builders. In St. Luke, He had shown, by the parable of the Nobleman going into a far country, that there was to be an interval between the *first* appearing of Messiah, and His appearing *in His kingdom*. But now in our Gospel, He treats of this matter more fully, shewing the character of this interval, or of His session for a while at the right hand of God in heaven.

Having, therefore, closed His public ministry, and being in retirement with the disciples, He occupies Himself with this subject. In the action of the 13th chapter, in the teaching of these 14th, 15th, and 16th chapters, and again in the action of the 17th, it is *the heavenly Priesthood* that He is variously either exhibiting or teaching; thus shewing that in His present

interval of separation from Israel, He is blessedly occupying Himself for the Church. In sympathies and intercessions, in the diligence and wakefulness of one whose eye is over them, He is all action towards His saints now. He is separated from His brethren according to the flesh, it is true, but He is, the while, like Moses, tending the flock of His Father at the Mount of God, far away both from Egypt's pollutions and Israel's unbelief, tasting the comforts of a beloved home and family, in holy retirement.

An impression of a very happy character lies on my mind from reading the opening of the 14th chapter. It is this. Our Lord *assumes* that His ministry had brought the Father so near to them that His disciples ought to have concluded that *His house was their home*. There is great consolation in this.

The Lord's ministry had been such a revelation of the Father's love to them, that it would have been strange indeed had this not been the case. Such a thing would have been an *exception*, and, therefore, to have been noticed. But, that there were mansions for them, as well as for Him, in the Father's house, was so fully in character with all His previous works and words, that such a fact, such a truth, needed no mention at all. It was a *necessary* conclusion. All family privileges were theirs, and of *course* the family mansion was their home.

What a conclusion for faith to be entitled to draw, without direct instruction! Nay, that we should be chargeable with spiritual dulness, if we did not draw it! How could such a ministry as that of Jesus, "the Son from the bosom," tell of anything less than this, that the Father's own house was to be our home for ever?

“Unfathomable wonder and mystery divine,” I may again say. All we need, is that spirit of child-like faith which rests in the reality of such surpassing grace.

Would that His family were refreshing the solitudes of the Son of God better than they do! Would that they were a more “beautiful flock” for His care and tendance at the Mount of God! a more joyous scene to compensate Him for His present loss of Israel! But He has laid down His life for them, He has given Himself for the sheep, and in His love He abideth faithful.

And these chapters, I may further say, shew us that the ministry of the Son had done nothing that was effectual upon the hearts of His disciples. For so the divine order ran—the Father had worked hitherto, the Son was now working, but the Holy Ghost had also to work, ere the Church could be set in her place. And thus it is not until now we get the name of God fully revealed. The revelation of it shines gradually brighter and brighter as dispensations advance. But this is a great subject.

In Genesis i. it is simply “God” that we see and hear. It is “God” who goes through the six days’ work, and then rests on the seventh. But in Genesis ii. it is “the Lord God” that we see and hear. And these are two stages in God’s revelation of Himself. In the 1st chapter we see Him coming forth, as God simply, for His own *delight* and *glory*. He takes His full delight in the work, beholding it all to be very good, and He glorifies Himself by the work, setting over it one in His own image, the representative of



Himself. But in the 2d, we see "the Lord God," that is, God in a covenanted character, God entered upon purposes and plans for the blessing of His creature. And, therefore, much of the previous detail of the work, as it proceeded under the hand of "God," is omitted, and many things are brought into view which had no place before. Thus, we have in strong relief, and which we had not at all in the 1st chapter, the Garden and the River, the manner of creating the Man, of investing him with dominion, of forming the Woman, and of instituting their union—and we have also the mystic Trees, and the Commandment with its penalty—for all these concerned the place and blessing of the creature in covenant with "the Lord God."\*

Thus, did He begin to unfold His name to us ; and after these first notices of "God" and "the Lord God," we get the name "God Almighty," published to Abram. This was a further revelation of Himself. And this was done, when Abram was "past age," and had nothing to lean upon but the almightiness, or all-sufficiency of God. (Gen. xvii. 1.) In this name, which declared this needed sufficiency, God led him, and Isaac, and Jacob after him ; for they were all strangers and pilgrims on the earth, having nothing but the promise of an Almighty Friend for their stay and staff. (Gen. xxviii., xxxv., xlviii.) In process of time, however, God was known to His children by another name. Bringing them into the covenant, into the promised inheritance, He calls Himself "Jehovah;" that is, the

\* We are conscious, when we utter the word "Lord," that we speak of one nearer to us, more our own, than when we say simply "God."

covenant God of Israel. (Ez. vi. 1-6.) And under God, as Jehovah, Israel take their seat in Canaan.

But still, all this did not communicate God in the full glory of His name. There was *grace* in God, and gifts by grace, which these ways of His did not fully unfold. But this is done in the name which is now published to us—the name of “Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.” This is the full name or glory of our God; and grace, and the gifts of grace, are effectually brought to us by that dispensation which publishes it.\*

Thus, it was not until the present age, that the full name and glory of our God was published. The Father had been working, it is true (see p. 45), in all ages of the Jewish times; but still Israel was put nationally under God, simply as “Jehovah.” The revelation of “the Father” had to wait for the ministry of the Son, and certain dispensations had to finish their course, ere the Son could come forth. The Son could not have been the minister of the law—such ministry would not have been worthy of Him who dwelt in the bosom of the Father. It was committed to angels. And the Son did not come forth in ministry, till the “great salvation” was ready to be published. (Heb. ii. 1, 2.) So, the manifestation of the Holy Ghost waited for its due time. The Holy Ghost could not wait on the ministry

\* The believer will ever take his sweetest delight in the last or fullest revelation of God. And in this, the believer and the mere man of science are distinguished. The merely philosophic man will allow the Divine hand to be displayed in creation; he will own “God” in the plants and the cattle, for instance; but the garden and the river, and the married pair, which “the Lord God” has to do with, have no attraction for him; but these are the objects that chiefly engage the *believer's* thoughts. *or Father*

of the law, any more than the Son. Smoke and lightning and the voice of thunder were there (Exod. xix.); but the Holy Ghost came forth with His gifts and powers, to wait on the ministry of the Son, on the publication of the great salvation. (Heb. ii. 4.) The Spirit of God could not be a spirit of bondage gendering fear—the law may do that, but the Holy Ghost must gender confidence. “*As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*”

Till the Son of God had finished His work, the Holy Ghost could not come forth. The heart must first be purged from an evil conscience, so that the temple might be sanctified for the indwelling Spirit, and the holy furniture (that is, the spirit of liberty and adoption, and the knowledge of glory) must be prepared for this temple; and all this could be done only by the *death, resurrection, and ascension of the Son.* The revelation of the Holy Ghost waited for these things. He had been, it is true, the holy power in all, from the beginning. He had spoken by the prophets. He was the strength of judges and kings. He was the power of faith, of service, and of suffering, in all the people of God. But all this was below the place which He now takes in the Church. His indwelling in us, as in His temple, had not been of old; but now He does so dwell, spreading out a kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy. As the Spirit of wisdom, He gives us, “the mind of Christ,” spiritual senses for the discerning of good and evil. As the Spirit of Worship, He enables us to call God “Father,” and Jesus “Lord.” He also makes intercession for us, with groanings that cannot be uttered. He sheds abroad in the heart “the love of God,” and causes us “to abound in hope.” He

is *in* us a well of water springing up into everlasting life; and He is the source also of "rivers of living waters," flowing forth *from* us to refresh the weary. And He forms the saints together as "a spiritual house," where "spiritual sacrifices" are offered; no longer admitting "a worldly sanctuary," and "carnal ordinances;" for they are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit, and gifts, causing them all to grow up into Christ in all things, are dispensed among them.

These are some of the ways of the Holy Ghost in His kingdom within the saint: these are His works which shine in the place of His dominion. He is there an Earnest, an Unction, and a Witness. He tells us "plainly of the Father," and "takes of the things of Christ," to "shew them to us." His presence in us is so pure, that there is no evil that He does not resent and grieve over (Eph. iv. 30); and yet so tender and sympathizing, that there is nothing of godly sorrow that He does not feel and groan over (Rom. viii. 23). He causes hope to abound; He imparts the sense of full divine favour; He reads to our conscience a title to calm and entire assurance. There is nothing of feebleness, or narrowness, or uncertainty in the place of His power. His operations savour of a *kingdom*, and a kingdom *of God* too, full of beauty and strength. We have to own how little we live in the virtue and sunshine of it; but still, this is what it is in itself, though our narrow and hindered hearts so poorly possess themselves of it. And His handiwork is to have its praise from us; and His glory in His temples is to be declared. It is well to be humbled at times, by testing ourselves in reference to such an indwelling

kingdom; but the kingdom itself is not to be so measured.\*

Precious, I need not say, beloved, all this mystery is. The whole order of things to which we are introduced tells us (and this is full of richest comfort) that it is *God* and not *ourselves* we have now *immediately* to do with. In the law it was otherwise. The law dealt with *us* immediately, saying, "*Thou* shalt," and "*Thou* shalt not." But now it is *God* we have first to do with. We are absolutely summoned away from ourselves, and are not to remember whether we were Jews or Greeks. We have *God* to look to, *God* to hear, *God* to do with. And this is the highest possible point of blessing for a poor sinner to apprehend—so blessed is it that Satan does what he can to keep us short of it, to make the ear heavy to the voice of *God*, the eye dim to the ways and works of *God*, and the heart irresponsible to the love of *God*. He would fain busy us with anything, that the light of the glory of the Gospel of Christ, *who is the image of God*, may not shine in. He makes some busy with thoughts of their righteousness, and others busy with thoughts of their sins, that he may keep them, either through vainglory or fear, apart from God Himself.

Now, to draw the disciples from a mere Jewish place into this elevation, and by this to comfort them under

\* I must observe here something that again strikes me as highly characteristic of this Gospel by John.—The name of God is published in a *formal* manner in Matthew; it is published, as I may say, literally, or in the strict terms and syllables of it (see chap. xxviii. 19). But in this Gospel, as we have now seen in these chapters, it is published after a *moral* method, the knowledge in that name, "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," being conveyed to the soul through a revelation of their several acts and ways, of the economy of our salvation and blessing.

the sense of His absence, is the Lord's great purpose in the discourse which He holds with them in these chapters, the like to which never passed between the sons of men—the heart and mind of God had never before so largely and blessedly communicated their treasures to the desires and thoughts of His people, as now the Lord was doing. Most sacred moments of communion between heaven and earth were these!

At the beginning the Lord says, "let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me." This at once gives them notice of another object of faith than what they as yet had. God, in the sense of these words, had been already known to Israel. The disciples, in their Jewish place, were already believers in *God*. The Lord here allows that, as He had before asserted, speaking to the woman of Samaria; "We (*i.e.* Jews) know what we worship." The Jews had God, their faith was not wrong, but only defective, and the Lord would now fill it out. He would now have them to know *the Father through the Son*—and the whole of this discourse with His disciples furthers this design. He speaks particularly of the Father, and promises the Comforter to make these things (the things of the Father and the Son) known to them.

This was the character of grace which this Gospel at the beginning intimated, when St. John wrote, "as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become *the sons* of God." And this early notice of the value and power of the Son's ministry, is, in these chapters, largely unfolded. But while this is doing, we have several forms of Jewish ignorance brought out—necessarily so, I may say, for Israel did not stand in this knowledge into which the Lord was now lead-

ing them. *Thomas* is ignorant of Christ's departure and separation from this earth, and says, "Lord, we know not whither thou goest;" for Israel had been taught to say that Christ was to abide for ever. *Philip* betrays his unacquaintedness with the Father; for it was not the knowledge of the Father in the Son that Israel had been led into. *Judas* wondered at any glory, but the manifested worldly glory of Messiah; for such was Israel's hope. And they all stand amazed at the mystery of "the little while." But out of these thoughts, the heavenly prophet is leading them. They had been already drawn out from the apostate nation, as God's remnant accepting Jesus as Messiah come from *God*, but they had still to know the Son as come from *the Father*, who, while He was with them, had been shewing them *the Father*, was now about to return to *the Father*, and would come again to take them home to *the Father*. These were the great things of His love which their divine prophet here reveals to them; but these were as yet strange things unto them.

But the course of our Lord's own thoughts through this conversation is only for a while interrupted by these defective Jewish thoughts of His disciples. His purpose was to elevate them to the sense of their calling, as the Church of God, and thus to comfort them; and that purpose He steadily follows, however He may, for a time, have to rebuke their slowness of heart. Thus: in the interruption occasioned by Peter (xiii. 33; xiv. 1), the Lord, in answering Peter, is called to contemplate and foretell his faithlessness, and denial of Him; but this does not turn out of their course the thoughts of kindness about him and the rest of them, which the Lord was pursuing. "Let not your hearts



be troubled," says the gracious Master, *immediately* after forewarning Peter of his sin. So, at the close of the conversation, He had to tell them that the hour was then at hand, when every one of them would go "to his own, and leave Him alone;" and yet, without allowing an interruption of His flow of love towards them for a single moment, He *at once* resumes His own thoughts, saying to them, "these things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace—in the world ye shall have tribulation; but, be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

And 'so, beloved, with His saints ever since. We may, through our own folly, have to listen to the "cock crowing"—to receive rebuke, go out, and weep; but the heart of Jesus does not repent of His purposed kindness toward us. His purpose is to save, and He will save—His purpose is to bless, and who shall hinder? He has not beheld iniquity in them. They are to have *peace* accomplished for them by His death, *life* brought to them by His resurrection, and *glory* to be hereafter theirs at His return. These are their blessings; and of these He tells them, in spite of all slowness of heart or unworthiness, for their comfort under the sense of His going away.

The works that Jesus did, in Matthew's Gospel, are owned to be those of the Son of David (xii. 23). They are there the seals of His *Messiahship*. But here the Lord offers them to His disciples as the seals of His *Sonship of the Father*. He would have them looked upon, not merely as tokens that He could *order the kingdom of Israel*, according to the promises of the prophets (Is. xxxv. 5, 6), but as witnesses that He was

the dispenser of the *Father's* grace and power ; for He says, "believe me, that I am in the Father, and the Father in me, or else believe me for the very works' sake." And this is in full consistency with our Gospel. And the "greater works," which He immediately afterwards promises that believers in Him should do, were to be, as I judge, works of the same character, works that were to savour of the *Father's* grace, such as the bringing poor condemned sinners into the liberty of the children of God. As Paul says, "in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel." And so is it still. Sinners are still brought into the liberty of dear children. "I will not leave you *orphans*," says the Lord in this place, "I will come to you ; because I live, ye shall live also." No orphanage for them, no lamentation from them as there was from Israel, that they were fatherless (xiv. 18 ; Gr. Lam. v. 3.) The *adoption* of the saints during the *orphanage* of Israel, is here brought out by the Lord, in terms of deep and wondrous meaning. They were to know that "He was in the Father, and they in Him, and He in them." The Father, the Father, is the holy burden here.

And there is a little action of the Lord's that I must notice. At the close of the 14th chapter He says, "peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you ;" by this telling them, that, ere He left this world He would leave His peace behind Him—peace for them as sinners accomplished by His death. And after thus telling them of *peace*, He says, "Arise, let us go hence." Upon which we may assume that they all rise from the paschal table, and walk forth toward the Mount of Olives ; and then it is, that He at once presents Himself to them, as in resurrection, their life, the

source of quickening power, saying, "I am the vine, and ye are the branches."

There is a beauteous significancy in the whole of this action. He sits at the paschal table till *peace* had been pronounced, for on that table the pledges of their peace were at that moment spread; but as He rises from it, He tells them of their resurrection-life—life that they were to know as in Him, risen above the power of death;—the true vine. And He tells them, that there is no other life but this, saying, "if a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch and is *withered*." And having thus disclosed to them the only root of life, He shows them the joys and holy prerogatives of this life, teaching them that they were to have His own joy, the joy of the Son, fulfilled in them, and were also to enter into the dignity and grace of friendship with their Lord, and to assure themselves that His glory and their blessing were now but one interest; and moreover, that the Father's great purpose was to glorify the Son as this vine or head of life; that having planted it as the only witness of life in the earth, which is the scene of death, the Father would watch over it with the care and diligence of a husbandman. This the Lord here shews to be the Father's *present* care, to have the vine in beauty and fruitfulness, to glorify Jesus as the HEAD OF LIFE, as by-and-by He will glorify Him on the throne of glory as HEIR OF ALL THINGS. In old times God's eye, as her husbandman, was upon the land of Israel (Deut. xi. 12); but now it is watching over this vine, which His own hand has planted.

All this told the disciples of exceeding riches of grace. But withal He tells them, that this union with

Him was to separate them from the world, this friendship with Him was to expose them to the world's hatred. The world was soon to express its full enmity to God, and then to them. The revelation of God in love, the revelation of the Father in and by the Son, was soon about to be fully refused by the world. This was hatred indeed, hatred "without a cause," hatred for love. The cross of Christ was soon to present man's fullest hatred meeting God's fullest love. Ignorant of *the Father*, it might be still zealous for *God*, and think to do God service by killing the children of the Father. For there may be zeal for the synagogue, yea, and for the God of the synagogue, with entire separation from the spirit of that dispensation which publishes riches of grace, and reveals the Father in the Son.

But this view of the sorrows which His saints might endure from the world, leads the Lord to exhibit the services of the promised Comforter in them and for them, still more blessedly. He tells them that the Comforter would stand *for* them *against* the world, convicting it of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, but at the same time dwelling in them the witness of their Father's love, and their Lord's glory. This comfort He provides for them against the day of the world's hatred.

And here let me observe, that the Spirit was now to be received of *the Father*. *God* had approved Jesus of Nazareth (Acts ii. 22): but it was of *the Father* that the Holy Ghost was to be received, and He would approve His presence according to this. Look at the character of His presence in the Church, immediately on His being given (Acts ii.). What an oil of gladness, what a spirit of liberty and largeness of heart, is He in

the saints there! Jesus had received Him in the ascended place, where He Himself had been made full of joy with God's countenance, and giving Him forth from such a place, He manifests Himself here accordingly, imparting at once something of that joy of God's countenance into which their Lord had entered. They *gladly* received the word, ate their bread with *gladness*, and *praised* God. And this joy could easily dry up other sources. They parted with what might have secured *human* delights and provided for *natural* desires. The Holy Ghost in them was joy and liberty and largeness of heart. It was the Spirit "of the Father." It was the reflection on the saints here of that light which had fallen on Jesus in the holiest. The oil had run down from the beard to the skirts of the clothing.

Indeed, we can form but a poor idea of the value of such a dispensation as this which the Comforter was now to bring, to a soul that had been under the spirit of bondage and of fear gendered by the law. What thoughts of judgment to come were now bidden to depart! What fears of death were now to yield to the consciousness of *present* life in the Son of God! And what would all this be but anointing with an oil of gladness? And the disciples, by this discourse, were under training for this joy and liberty. The schoolmaster was soon to give up his charge—his rod and his book of elements were now to be dispensed with—and in this discourse, the Son is leading the children on their way home to their Father from under such tutors and governors, and they are soon to reach the Father, that they might know, through the Holy Ghost, the liberty and joy of adoption.

Such was this interesting hour to the Church. The Holy Ghost, the witness of the Father and the Son, and thus the Spirit of adoption, was soon to be imparted, and they were now led forth from the school of the law to wait for it. With thoughts of the Father and of the Son, and of the Church's interests in all their love, the Holy Ghost was now to fill the saints. And this accordingly He does in our dispensation. He tells us, as the Lord here promises He should, of the delight that the Father has in the Son, of His purpose to glorify Him, and of our place in that delight and glory. He takes of these things and the like, and shews them unto us.

Look at Genesis xxiv.—a well-known and much enjoyed scripture. It sets forth the election of a bride for the Son by the Father—but the place which the servant occupies in it, is just the place of the Holy Ghost in the Church, ministering (as in divine grace) to the joys of the Son, and the Church, in perfecting the purposes of the Father's love. In that scene, the servant of Abraham tells Rebecca of the way in which God had prospered his master—what a favoured and beloved one Isaac was, how he had been “the child of old age,” and how Abraham had made him “the heir of all his possessions.” He discloses to her the counsels which Abraham had taken touching a wife for this much loved son of his, and lets her see clearly her own election of God to fill that holy and honoured place. And at last he puts upon her the pledges of this election and of Isaac's love.

Nothing could be more touching and significant than the whole scene. Would that our hearts knew more of the power of all this, under the Holy Ghost, as

Rebecca knew it under the hand of Abraham's servant! It was because he had filled her with thoughts of Abraham and of Isaac, and of her own interest in them, that she was ready to go with this Stranger all alone across the desert. Her mind was formed by these thoughts; and she was prepared to say to her country, her kindred, and her father's house, "I will go." And the thoughts of our heavenly Father's love, and our Isaac's delight in us, can still give us holy separation from this defiled place where we dwell. Communion with the Father and the Son through the Comforter, is the holy way of distinguishing the Church from the world. There may be the fear of a coming judgment working something of *actual* separation from it, or the pride of the Pharisee working *religious* separation from it, but the present knowledge of the Father's love and the hope of the coming glories of the Son, can alone work a *divine* separation from its course and its spirit.

The Father's love, of which the Comforter testifies, is an *immediate* love. It is the love *of God* that has visited the world in the gift of His Son (see iii. 16); but the moment this love of God is believed, and the message of reconciliation which it has set forth is received, then are believers entitled, through riches of grace, to know *the Father's* love, a love that is an *immediate* love, as the Lord here tells us (xvi. 26, 27). It is of this love of the Father, as the glory of the Son, that the Comforter tells us by the way homeward. He is our companion for all the journey, and this is His discourse with us. How did the servant, I doubt not (to return to the same chapter, Gen. xxiv.), as he accompanied Rebecca across the desert, tell her further



of his master, adding many things to what he had already told her in Mesopotamia ; for he had been the confidant of his master, and had known him from the beginning. He knew his desire for a son, and God's promise and God's faithfulness. He knew of Abraham's victory over the kings, of his rescue of Lot, and meeting with Melchisedek. He knew of the covenant, the pledge of the inheritance. He knew of the dismissal of Ishmael from the house, and of Isaac's walk in it without a rival—of the mystic journey up Mount Moriah, and of Isaac being thus alive from the dead. All this he knew, and all this doubtless he told her of, as they travelled on together, with these recollections and prospects delighting her, though her back was now turned, and turned for ever, upon her country and her father's house. And, beloved, were we more consciously "on the way" with the Comforter, the way would to us in like manner be beguiled by His many tales of love and glory, whispering of the Father and of the Son to our inmost souls.—Be it so with us, thy poor people, blessed Lord, more and more !

XVII.—After thus comforting them with the knowledge of their standing, as the family of the Father, and, as it were, making gracious amends to them for His own absence from them "after the flesh," and the hatred they were to suffer from the world, the Lord again exhibits, in this chapter, one of His priestly services, as He had done in the 13th. But the services are different ; both, however, together constituting a full presentation of His ways as our Advocate in the heavenly temple. In the 13th chapter, He had, as it were, laid one hand on the defiled feet of His saints,

here He lays the other hand on the throne of the Father—forming, thus, a chain of marvellous workmanship reaching from God to sinners. In the 13th chapter, His body was girt, and He was stooping down towards our feet—here, His eyes are lifted up, and He is looking in the face of the Father. What that is asked for us, by one who thus fills up the whole distance between the bright throne of God and our defiled feet, can be denied? All must be granted—such an one is heard always.

Thus we get the sufficiency and acceptance of the Advocate, and we may notice the order in which He makes His requests, and lays His claims, before the Father.

*First.*—He makes request in behalf of the Father's own glory. "Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that *thy Son also may glorify thee.*" His first thought was upon the Father's interest; as He had before taught His disciples, ere they presented their own desires and necessities, to say, "Our Father which art in heaven, *hallowed be thy name.*"

Life eternal the Lord lays in the Father's hand; saying, "As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." By this our Mediator bows to the truth of God, which Satan of old had <sup>pleaded</sup> ~~traduced~~, and which man had questioned (Gen. iii. 4). But He then adds, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent,"—owning that life is now to be had only through redemption, that it is not the life of a *creature merely*, but of a *ransomed creature*, a life rescued for us from the power of death by the grace of the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ the Saviour.

*Secondly.*—He claims His own glory. “Glorify me with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” And this claim He grounds upon His having finished the work that had been given Him to do, saying, “I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.” For this was a work into which no blot had entered, in which, therefore, God could rest and be refreshed, as in His works of old; a work which the Father might behold, and say of it, “it is all very good;” in which He might again find a Sabbath.

And this is the believer’s comfort, that he sees his salvation depending on a finished work, in which God “smells a savour of rest.” At the beginning, on finishing the work of creation, God sanctified the seventh day, resting in full satisfaction in all that His hand had formed. But that rest man disturbed, so that God repented that He had made man on the earth. Again, in due time, the Lord provided for Himself another rest, erecting a Tabernacle in Canaan, and offering to Israel a place in that rest, giving them His Sabbath (Exod. xxxi. 13). By the sword of Joshua, this rest in Canaan was first made good to Israel (Josh. xxi. 44; xxiii. 1); and then under the throne of Solomon (1 Chron. xxii. 9). But Israel, like Adam, disturbed this rest—the land did not keep her Sabbath, for the wickedness of them that dwelt therein (2 Chron. xxxvi. 21). The blessed God has now found another and a sure rest, a rest that can never be lost or disturbed. In the work finished by the Lord Jesus Christ (and which the Lord here presents to Him) God again rests, as in His works of old, with fullest complacency. This finished work is altogether according

to His mind. By the resurrection of Christ, the Father has said of it, "Behold, it is very good." It is His rest for ever; He has an abiding delight in it; His eyes and His heart are upon it continually. *The work of Christ accomplished for sinners has given God a rest.* That is a thought full of blessing to the soul. And when faith sets a right value, that is, God's value, on the blood, there is rest, God's own rest, for the soul. But it is then that the Saint (or believing Sinner) begins his toil. The moment I rest as a *Sinner*, I begin my labour as a *Saint*. The rest for the Saint is a rest *that remaineth*; and therefore it is written, "Let us *labour* therefore to enter into that *rest*, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief." The Sinner rests now, the Saint labours still, and will till the kingdom come.

*Thirdly.*—He prays for His people. He asks that <sup>1</sup>they might be kept through the Father's name, and <sup>2</sup>sanctified through the Father's truth, so that they might be one in the communion of the Son's joy *now*; and He asks that <sup>3</sup>they might be <sup>a</sup>with Him where He is, and there behold His glory, and be one with Him in His glory *hereafter*. These are large requests. The Divine Advocate would have *all* His saints *one* (see ver. 11, 21). But this oneness is not such, I judge, as it is commonly interpreted to be—a manifested ecclesiastical oneness. It is a oneness in personal knowledge of, and fellowship with, the Father and the Son—oneness in spirit, in the spirit of their minds, each of them having the spirit of adoption, which was the peculiar grace and power of that dispensation which He, the Son, was about to introduce. The desire is, that such a spirit might have its course

in the hearts of each and all of the elect now to be gathered.

Has this failed? That could not be. And all the Epistles witness to us that it has not. For there we find the saints in every place, whether Jew or Gentile, considered as kept by the Father in His own name; kept as sons, as "accepted in the Beloved," as having the "spirit of adoption," as being brought together "into the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God." All such statements are assertions that this desire of the great Advocate had been answered, each believer having the joy of the Son fulfilled in himself, and thus all of them one in the spirit of their minds. This desire does not, I assuredly judge, respect any *ecclesiastical* condition of things. That thought has led to many a human effort among the saints. They have condemned themselves for not realizing this prayer of the Lord by a manifestation of unity; and then they have taken means to bring this about. But I ask, is this prayer of the Lord made contingent on the energies of the saints? Is it not addressed to the Father, for what rested simply in the good pleasure, and power, and gift of the Father? Surely. It appealed to the Father, that He would keep the elect in His name, sanctify them by His truth, and impart to them the joy of the Son, so that each might have that joy fulfilled in himself.

This desire has been realised. The spirit of the Son is equally for each and all of the saints, and they are one in that spirit and in that joy. When the due season comes, we shall see the other desires of this chapter also made good. All who are to receive the testimony have not yet been called, nor has the glory

yet shone out and been imparted to them, so that as yet the world has neither believed or known that the Father has sent the Son (see ver. 21, 23). The world as yet knows them not (1 John iii. 1). But in their season these requests will be answered. And so, in like manner, the vision of glory (see ver. 24). As far as we have gone in divine dispensation, the desires have been answered; the rest only wait for their season.

To us, however, beloved, it is most comforting to find that all these glorious desires for the saints our Lord grounds simply on this, that they had received the Son's testimony about the Father, and had believed surely in the Father's love. "I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me."

But how full of blessing it is, to see that we are presented before God simply as believing that love! How surely does it tell us, that the pleasure of our God is this, that we should know Him in love, know Him as the Father, know Him according to the words of Him who has come from His bosom. This is joy and liberty. And it is indeed only as having seen God in love, seen the Father and heard the Father in Jesus, that makes us the family. It is not the graces that adorn us, or the services that we render, but simply that we know the Father. It is this which distinguishes the saint from the world, and gives him his standing, as here, in the presence of the Father. It is simply *this* (as the Mediator here tells the Father about us), that we have received His word, received the Son's testimony of love brought from the Father's bosom.

Thus does the divine Advocate plead before the

Throne. The Father's glory, His own, and His people's, are all provided for and secured. And having thus poured forth the desires of His soul, He commits "the world," the great enemy, to the notice of the *righteous* Father. "O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee." For it had now proved itself to be a world that indeed knew not the Father, that hated Him whom the Father had sent, and out of which the Lord was now sanctifying Himself, and drawing His people. He does not, however, call for judgment upon it; but leaves it (as something with which, as our Advocate, He had nothing to do) simply under the notice of the "righteous Father," to whose judgment it belonged.

And it is merely as *being ignorant of the Father* that the Lord presents the world. He does not arraign her sins before the Throne, but simply presents her as ignorant of the Father; as before, when presenting the Church, He did not speak of her graces or services, as we saw, but simply this, *that she knew the Father*. For as the knowledge of the Father makes the Church what she is, so this ignorance of the Father is that which makes the world what it is. The world is that which refuses to know God in love, so as to rejoice in Him. It will make up its own pleasures, and draw from its own resources; it will have anything but the music, and the ring, and the fatted calf of the Father's house. The world was formed by Satan in the garden of Eden. There the serpent beguiled the woman; and, being listened to and spoken with, he formed the human mind according to his own pattern. We have the history and character of this evil work in Genesis iii. God's love and God's word were traduced by the



enemy—man believed the slander, and made God a liar. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, were planted in the soul as master-powers (verse 6); and then, conscience and fear and avoidance of God became the condition into which man was cast. The man and the woman began to know that they were naked, and they hid themselves among the trees, retreating from the voice of God; and then, from the covert where they lay, they send forth excuses for themselves, and challenges of God. “The serpent *beguiled me* and I did eat,” says Eve—“the woman whom *thou* gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat,” says Adam.

Such was the man then, and such has the world been ever since. Man’s own lusts are ruling him, with fear of God, and desired distance from Him; and the secret whisper of his soul is this, that all this mischief must lie at God’s own door.

From such a world the saints are in spirit and in calling delivered, and the world itself left, as here, for judgment. “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” The world had no place in Jesus. The prince of it came and only drew from Him the full witness of this, that He loved the Father, and would do as He had commanded (xiv. 30, 31). So the saints have left it. They have come forth from their covert at the voice of the Son; they have heard of the Father’s love towards them; they have believed it, and have walked forth in the sunshine of it. The promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head drew Adam forth from behind the trees of the garden; though *dead* in sins, he believed this promise of life, and came forth accordingly, calling his

wife “the mother of all *living*.” And so, as we have seen in this chapter, it is just the believing the message of love which the Son has brought to us from the bosom of the Father—it is just this, that makes the saints what they are—an election out of the dark and distant regions where the world dwells, and where the spirit of the world breathes. And it is, as we have also seen, the refusal to listen to this message of love that keeps the world still the world. “O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee.” For men have only to receive God’s word of reconciliation, to believe His love in the gift of His Son, and then to take their happy place in His family as His chosen ones, “accepted in the Beloved.”

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Here the third section of our Gospel ends. It has shewn us Jesus, the Son of the Father, as our Advocate, doing His constant services for us—it has shewn us also Jesus, the Son of the Father, revealing the Father to the children. The blessed God had got Himself a name, the name of “Jehovah,” by His signs and wonders in Egypt and in Israel (Jer. xxxii. 20); but now was He getting Himself another name, a name of still richer grace, the name of “Father.” This name He gets in the person and by the work of the Son of His love; and the power of it is now made effectual in the hearts of the children by the Holy Ghost.

Lo, these are parts of Thy ways, our God and Father; but how little a portion of Thee do our narrow souls understand and enjoy!

But here, ere we enter on the last portion of our Gospel, I would suggest, that we receive an impression of intense personality, of a divine purpose to indi-

individualize us, when we read the writings of St. John. His Gospel at once gives us this. The world did not know Him who made it, Israel did not receive Him who owned them; but "as many" as received Him, He entitled and enabled to become sons of God. This we read at the beginning of the Gospel. We are addressed in our common place of ruin, and in our common character as sinners, victims of the lie of the old Serpent. The scenes before us keep us in the sense of our individuality before God. They do not address us as in any relative place, or where previous dispensations may have put us; but rather where the common destruction of the nature has put us, in that "darkness," that alienation from God, which our fall and apostacy at the beginning brought us.

What a direct, emphatic character is thus given to these scriptures! How they tell us, whether indeed it be his Gospel or his epistles that we are reading, that we are to have, and to know that we have, each one of us, our own place and interest before the living God.

And according to this, we may observe something in the Lord's own way in this Gospel by John that is peculiar to it, and characteristic of this intense personality, of which I am speaking.

In the earlier part of it, or during His public ministry, the apostles are kept very much apart from Him; and then, in the following part, or in His interview and discourse with them, they are brought specially near to Him.

In the earlier part, or during His public ministry (i.-x.), we see Him very remarkably *alone* in His work, as indeed I have before observed. He does not, as in the other Gospels, appoint twelve and seventy to be

the companions of His ministry; He is alone with sinners, settling with them the great interests of their souls, in the grace and virtue of the Son of God. And blessed it is to see this. It is one of the dearest thoughts to us sinners, that we may be alone with Jesus, and that apostles and churches, or fellow-saints and ordinances, are not needed for this business which is to determine our own personal, individual eternity. The well of Samaria, where the Son of the Father met the sinner, was to her as solitary a spot as Luz, of old, had been to Jacob. But like Luz to Jacob, it became Bethel to her, the very gate of heaven.

But let me add—this being apart from His apostles or His disciples—this solitariness of the Son of God with the sinner, during His public ministry, was *for the sinner's sake*, and not *against the disciples*. He loved His servants and companions, and would not refuse them a share in His services and rewards. But He must consult for the poor sinner, and will not allow him to be deprived of the deep consolation which this thought must carry with it, that in the settling of his interests for eternity, none need be with him but Himself.

This public scene of His service, however, ends with the 10th chap., as we have already said. The fruit grace being sealed to sinners, in due time, as we have also already said, Jesus, leaving His ministry abroad, deals with His own in secret; and then we find that He brings Himself nearer than ever, as near indeed as He can, as near as affection could desire.

After Judas is gone (chap. xiii.) and all is over as between Jesus and the scene around Him, and He can be alone with the disciples, as He had been with sinners,

we see Him then in the dearest, closest intimacies (xiv.—xvi.). He retires to them as into the bosom of a family, letting out the fulness of His heart. Of the Father, and the Father's house, the Father's love, and the Father's secrets, He speaks, promising also the Comforter to make this effectual to their souls, and that He Himself, though in a distant place, would still serve and remember them.\*

What a sight thus passes before us in the progress of this Divine Gospel! If in the earlier part, the solitude of the Son of God with the sinner made him feel as at the "gate of heaven," what is this latter part to the soul of the saint, this intimacy of the Son of the Father with His elect, but heaven itself!

John's is, indeed, the Gospel of the intimacies of the Son of God, first with the sinner and then with the disciple. And blessed beyond expression is such a thought, had we but hearts open and soft to receive it.

All is grace, and grace delights to display the *variousness* of its ways, as well as the riches of its stores. O for a simple, believing mind, beloved, that is able to occupy itself with such secrets and such treasures!

\* Because of the nearness of His heart to them, He feels their carelessness or indifference, and lets them know (as near affection could do) that He had felt this, and had been wounded by it. (see chap. xiv. 28; xvi. 5.)

## CHAPTERS XVIII.—XXI.

I HAVE followed this Gospel in its order, down to the close of the 17th chapter, having distributed it so far into three principal sections :—*the first*, introducing our Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Stranger from heaven, and giving us His action and reception in the world ;—*the second*, exhibiting Him in His intercourses and controversies with Israel ;—*the third*, giving Him to us in the bosom of His elect, instructing them in the mysteries of the heavenly Priesthood, and in their standing as the children of the Father. And now, we have to consider *the fourth* and closing section which gives us all that attended on His death and resurrection. May the entrance of the Lord's words still give light, and bear with them to our souls a savour of that blessed One of whom they speak !

But while in labours like these, beloved, we seek to discover the order of the divine word, and are led to wonder at its depths, or admire its beauty, we should remember that it is its *truth* we must chiefly consider. It is when the word comes with "much assurance," that it works "effectually" in us. It will not profit if not mixed with *faith*. Its power to gladden and to purify will depend on its being received *as truth* ; and as we trace out, and present to one another, the beauties, the depths, and the wonders of the word, we should oftentimes pause, and say to our souls, as the angel said to the overwhelmed Apostle who had seen the lovely visions and heard the marvellous revelations, "these are the *true* sayings of God."

The place in our Gospel to which I have now ar-

rived, presents our Lord Jesus Christ in His sufferings. But I may notice that it is not His sufferings that occupy Him in this Gospel. Throughout it He appears to stand above the reproaches of the people, and the world's rejection of Him. So that, when the last passover was approaching, though in the other Gospels we see Him with His mind full upon His being the Lamb that was chosen for it, saying to His disciples, "ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of Man is betrayed to be crucified," yet in our Gospel it is not so. He goes up to Jerusalem at the time; but it is to seat Himself in the midst of an elect household (xii. 1). And so afterwards. When He is alone with His disciples, He stands above His sorrows and the world still—He does not tell them of the Jews betraying Him to the Gentiles, and of the Gentiles crucifying Him—He does not speak of His being mocked, and scourged, and spit upon, as in the other Gospels. All this is passed by. The many things which the Son of Man was to suffer at the hands of sinful men lie untold here. But, on the other hand, He assumes the hour of the power of darkness to be past; and as soon as we find Him alone with His elect, He takes His place beyond that hour (xiii. 1). Gethsemane and Calvary are behind Him, and He apprehends Himself as having reached the hour, not of the garden, or of the cross, but of the Mount of Olives, the hour of His ascension; our Evangelist saying, "now when Jesus knew that his hour was come, *that he should depart from this world unto the Father:*" these words shewing us plainly that His mind was not upon His suffering, but on the heaven of the Father that was beyond it. He spreads before them, not the memorials



of His death here, but of His life in heaven, as we have seen; for He washes their feet after supper. And all His discourse with His beloved ones afterwards (xiv.—xvi.) savoured of this. It all assumed that His sorrow was past—that He had finished His course—that He had stood against the Prince of this world, and had conquered—that He continued in the Father's love, and that all was ripe for His being glorified. His words to them assumed this; and, on the ground of this, He strengthened them to conquer, as He had conquered. Instead of telling them of His sorrows, His object is to comfort them in theirs. He gave them peace, and the promise of the Comforter, and of the glory that was to follow. And when, for a moment, as urged by their state of mind, He speaks of their all leaving Him alone in the coming hour, it was not without this assurance—"and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." And, in like manner, when He was separating Judas from the rest, we read that "He was troubled in spirit;" but as soon as the traitor was gone, He rises at once to His own proper elevation, and says, "now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him." Thus, if His soul pass through a groan or trouble, it is but for a moment, and just to lead Him into a fuller view of the glory that was beyond it all.

It is just the same, as He descends into the deepest shades of His lonely way. Even here it is still strength that accompanies Him throughout, and glory that appears before Him throughout. And thus, whether in labour, in testimony, or in suffering, He is still, in this Gospel, in His elevation as Son of God. He walks on in the consciousness of His dignity; He takes the cup

as from the Father's hand, and lays down His life of Himself.

XVIII., XIX.—We may remember that in the 17th chapter, we saw our Lord as the Advocate in the heavenly temple, making His requests ; from that place He now comes down to meet the hour of the power of darkness. In that chapter, His heart and His eye had been full of His Father's glory, of His own glory, and of the Church's ; and forth from all this, thus in spirit set before Him, He comes out to endure the cross.

In the other Gospels, He meets the cross, after the strengthening that He had received from the angel in Gethsemane ; but we have nothing of that scene here ; for that was the passage of the Son of man through the anticipation of His agony, his *soul* being exceeding sorrowful even unto death, with the strength of God by an angel ministered to Him. But here, it is the Son of God descending as from heaven to meet the cross ; and His passage through the whole of the hour of the power of darkness is taken in the strength of the Son of God. He seeks no companionship. In the other Gospels, we see Him leading aside Peter, James, and John, if haply He might engage their sympathy to watch with Him for an hour. But here, there is none of this. He passes all alone through the sorrow. The disciples, it is true, go with Him into the garden, but He knows them there, only as needing His protection, and not as yielding Him any desired sympathy. "If ye seek me, let these go their way." As the angel does not strengthen Him in the garden, neither do His disciples stand with Him there for any cause of His. He comes down as the Son of God from His own place on high ; to walk (as far as man was concerned) *alone*

to Calvary. Though His present path lay to the cross, it was still a path of none less than the Son of God. The loneliness of the Stranger from heaven, is marked here, as it had been all through this Gospel.

And let me add (a reflection that has occurred to me with much comfort), that there is a greatness in God, in the sense of which we should much exercise our hearts. There is no straitness in Him. The Psalmist appears to give himself to this thought in the 36th Psalm. All that he there sees in God, he sees in its proper Divine greatness and excellency. His mercy is *in the heavens*, His faithfulness *unto the clouds*; His righteousness is like *the great mountains*, and His judgments like *the deep*; His preserving care so perfect that the *beasts as well as men are the objects of it*; His loving-kindness so excellent, that the children of men hid themselves as *under the shadow of His wings*; His house is so stored with all good, that His people are *abundantly satisfied* with its fatness; and His pleasures for them so full, that they drink of them *as of a river*. All this is the greatness and magnificence of God, not only in Himself, but in His ways and dealings with us. And, beloved, this is blessed truth to us. For our sins should be judged in the sense of this greatness. It is true, indeed, that sin is exceeding sinful. The least soil or stain upon God's fair workmanship is full of horrid shapes, in the eye of faith that calculates duly on God's glory. A little hole dug in the wall is enough to shew a prophet great abominations. But when brought to stand, side by side, with the greatness of the grace that is in God our Saviour, how does it appear? Where was the crimson sin of the adulteress? where the sins that had, as it were,

grown old in the Samaritan woman? They may be searched for, but they cannot be found. They disappear in the presence of the grace that was brought to shine beside them. The abounding grace rolled away the reproach for ever. God who taketh up the isles as a very little thing, and measures the waters in the hollow of His hand, takes away our sins far off "to a land of separation" (Lev. xvi. 22).

" I hear the accuser roar  
Of ills that I have done—  
I know them well, and thousands more—  
Jehovah findeth none."

With these thoughts we may well encourage our hearts. Our God would have us know Him in His own greatness. Set sin alone, and the least speck of it is a monster. Set it beside His grace, and it vanishes. And all this expression of the Divine greatness breaks forth in Jesus throughout this Gospel. There is everywhere the tone and bearing of the Son of God in Him and about Him, though we see Him even in toil or in suffering.

But this only by the way.—We have now followed our Lord over the brook Kedron; and the spot must have been one of sacred and affecting recollections to Him. For here it was that David had once stopped with Ittai his friend, and with Zadok and the ark, as he went forth from Jerusalem in the fear of Absalom. Over this very brook, and up this very ascent of Mount Olivet, the king of Israel had then gone weeping, his head covered and his feet bare, while Ahithophel, who (like Judas now) had once been his counsellor, was betraying him to his enemies. (2 Sam. xv.). Jesus, we read, oftentimes resorted hither; no doubt with these

recollections. But it is the Son of God we have here at the present time, rather than the Son of David. The brook is passed and the garden is entered, not with tears, and without the ark; but more than the ark in all its glory and strength are to be displayed now. The Lord comes forth to them, a band of cruel officers and soldiers as they were, with this word, "whom seek ye?"—thus addressing them, as in the *repose* of heaven, which was His. And He comes forth in the *power* of heaven, as well as in its *repose*—for on His afterwards saying to them, "I am He," they go backward and fall to the ground. No man could take His life from Him. He has even to shew them their prey; for all their torches and lanterns would not otherwise have discovered Him to them. Every stage in the way was His own. He laid down His life of Himself. They that would eat up His flesh must stumble and fall. They that desired His hurt must be turned back and put to confusion. The fire was ready to consume this Roman captain and his fifty. Had the Son of God pleased, there, on the ground, the enemy would still have lain. But He came, not to destroy men's lives, but to save; and therefore He would lay down His own. It was just seen that the glory that might have confounded all the power of the adversary, was hid within the pitcher; but He would fain hide it still.

And now it was that, in spirit, He sang the 27th Psalm. The Lord was His light and His salvation, whom should He fear? He had just seen God's glory in the sanctuary (as we saw in the 17th chapter), and, according to this Psalm, His longing was to dwell in that house of the Lord for ever. It was a time of

trouble, it is true ; but, in spirit, His head was lifted up above His enemies ; and He was soon to offer in the tabernacle sacrifices of joy, and sing His praises unto the Lord. (Psalm xxvii. 1-6.)

Thus, as Son of God, He stood in this hour, and could have stood against hosts of them ; but He would take the cup from His Father's hand, and give His life for the Church. Those who were with Him become now, in their wilfulness, an offence to Him. His kingdom was not as yet of this world ; and therefore His servants might not fight. Peter draws his sword, and would fain have changed the scene into a mere trial of human strength. But this must not be. It is true, the Son of God could have stood. He might again have been the ark of God, with the power of the enemy falling before it ; but how then should the Scripture be fulfilled ? He rather leaves Himself in the hands of enemies. "Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound Him."

Thus was it, so far, with the Lord. And as we still follow Him, we still trace the way of the Son of God, the Lord from heaven. Whether we listen to Him with the officers, or with the high priest, or before Pilate, it is still in the same tone of holy distance from all that was around Him. They may do to Him whatsoever they list—He is as a stranger to it. He is not careful to answer them in their matters. He would pass through all in loneliness. The daughters of Jerusalem do not here either yield Him their sympathy, or receive His ; nor does a dying thief share that hour with Him. He is the lonely One all through that dreary way. Peter is found *in the way of the ungodly, warming himself among them*, as one who had only the

resources which they had. Another (perhaps John himself) takes his place *as the acquaintance of the high priest*, and gets his advantage as such. But all this was a sinking down into mere nature, and leaving the Son of God alone—as He had said to them, “Ye . . . shall leave me alone : and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.”

And His path, I need not say, is without a stain. Let God be true, but every man a liar. So Jesus is without fault, though all beside fail. He was “justified in the Spirit.” He has no step to retrace, no word to recall. He could righteously vindicate Himself in everything, and even reprove His accuser, and say, “if I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil, but if well, why smitest thou me?” But even Paul, in such a case, had to recall his word, and to say, “I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest.”

From the hand of the high priest the Lord passes into the hand of the Roman governor. And here a scene opens full of solemn warning to us all, beloved, as well as preserving before us still the full character of our Gospel.

It is very evident that throughout this scene, Pilate was desirous to quiet the people, and deliver Jesus from the malice of the Jews. It appears, from the very first, that he was sensible of something peculiar in this prisoner of theirs. His silence had such a character in it, that, as we read, “the governor marvelled greatly.” And what divine attractions (we may observe) must every little passage of His life, every path that He took among men, have had about it, and what must the condition of the eye and the ear and the heart of man have been, that they did not discern and allow all this!



The governor's first impression was strengthened by every thing that happened, as the scene proceeded; his wife's dream, the evident malice of the Jews, and above all this righteous, guiltless prisoner (though thus in shame and suffering) still persisting that He was the Son of God, all assailed his conscience. But the world in Pilate's heart was too strong for these convictions in his conscience. They made a noise, it is true, within him, but the voice of the world prevailed; and he went the way of the world, though thus convicted. Could he, however, have preserved the world for himself, he would willingly have preserved Jesus. He let the Jews fully understand that he was in no fear of Jesus; that He was not such an One as could create with him any alarm about the interest of his master the Emperor. But they still insisted that He had been making Himself a king, and that if he let this man go, he could not be Cæsar's friend. And this prevailed.

How does all this lead us to see, that there is no security for the soul, but in the possession of that faith which overcomes the world! Pilate had no desire for the blood of Jesus, as the Jews had; but the friendship of Cæsar must not be hazarded. The rulers of Israel had once feared that, if they let this man alone, the Romans would come and take away both their place and nation (John xi. 48); and Pilate now fears to lose the friendship of the same world in the person of the Roman Emperor. And thus did the world bind him and the Jews together in the act of crucifying the Lord of Glory: as it is written, "for of a truth, against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together."

Still, as I have observed, Pilate would have saved Jesus, could he, at the same time, have saved his own reputation as Cæsar's friend; and therefore it was that he now entered the judgment-hall, and put this enquiry to Jesus, "Art thou the king of the Jews?" For as the Jews had committed the Lord to him, upon a charge of having made Himself a king (Luke xxiii. 2), if he could but lead the Lord to retract His kingly claims, he might both save Him, and keep himself unharmed. With the design of doing so, he seems at this time to enter the judgment-hall. But the world in Pilate's heart knew not Jesus; as it is written, "The world knew him not." (John i. 10; 1 John iii. 1.) Pilate was now to find, that the god of this world had nothing in Him. "Jesus answered, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?" Our Lord by this would learn from Pilate himself, where the source of the accusation against Him lay; whether His claim to be king of the Jews was challenged by Pilate as protector of the emperor's right in Judea, or merely upon a charge of the Jews.

Upon this hung, I may say, every thing in the present juncture; and the wisdom and purpose of the Lord in giving the inquiry this direction is manifest. Should Pilate say, that he had become apprehensive of the Roman interests, the Lord could at once have referred him to the whole course of His life and ministry, to prove that, touching the king, innocency had been found in Him. He had taught the rendering to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's. He had withdrawn Himself, departing into a mountain alone, when He perceived that the multitude would have taken Him by force to make Him a king. His controversy was not with

Rome. When He came, He found Cæsar in Judea, and He never questioned his title to be there; He rather, at all times, allowed his title and took the place of the nation, which, because of disobedience, had the image and the superscription of Cæsar engraven, as it were, on their very land. It is true, that it was despite of the Majesty of Jehovah that had made way for the Gentiles to enter Jerusalem; but Jerusalem was, for the present, the Gentiles' place, and the Lord had no controversy with them because of this. Nothing but the restored faith and allegiance of Israel to God could rightfully cancel this title of the Gentiles. The Lord's controversy was, therefore, not with Rome; and Pilate would have had his answer according to all this, had the challenge proceeded from himself as representative of the Roman power. But it did not. Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me; what hast thou done?"

Now this answer of Pilate conveyed the full proof of the guilt of Israel. In the mouth of him who represented the power of the world at that time, the thing was established, that Israel had disclaimed their King and sold themselves into the hand of another. This, for the present, was everything with Jesus. This at once carried him beyond the earth, and out of the world. Israel had rejected Him; and His kingdom was, therefore, not from hence; for Zion is the appointed place for the King of the whole earth to sit and rule; and the unbelief of the daughter of Zion must keep the King of the earth away.

The Lord, then, as this rejected King, listening to this testimony from the lips of the Roman, could only recognize the present loss of His throne. "Jesus

answered, My kingdom is not of this world ; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews : but now is my kingdom not from hence." He had no weapons for war, if Israel refused him. There was no threshing for His floor now, for Israel is His instrument to thresh the mountains (Isa. xli. 15 ; Micah iv. 13 ; Jer. xi. 20), and Israel was refusing Him. The house of Judah, and that only, is Messiah to make "His goodly horse in the battle" (Zech. x. 4) ; and, therefore, in this unbelief of Judah, He had nothing wherewith to break the arrows of the bow, the shield, the sword, and the battle (Ps. lxxvi.). His kingdom could not be "of this world ;" it could not be "from hence ;" He had no servants who could fight, that He should not be delivered to His enemies.

This present loss of His kingdom, however, does not annul His title to it ; for the Lord, while allowing His present loss of it, yet allows this in such terms as fully express His title to it, and led Pilate at once to say, "Art thou a king, then ?" And to this His good confession is witnessed. For Pilate would have had no cause to dread either the displeasure of his master or the tumult of the people ; he might have fearlessly followed his will and delivered his prisoner if the blessed Confessor would now alter the word that had gone out of His lips, and withdraw His claim to be a King. But Jesus answered, "Thou sayest that I am a king." From this, His claim, there could be no retiring. Here was "His good confession before Pontius Pilate." Though His own received Him not, yet He was theirs ; though the world knew Him not, yet it was made by Him. Though the husbandmen were

casting Him out, yet He was the heir of the vineyard. He was anointed to the throne in Sion, though His citizens were saying they would not have Him to reign over them; and He must by His "good confession" fully verify His claim to it, and stand to that claim before all the power of the world. It might arm all that power against Him, but it must be made. Herod, and all Jerusalem, had once been moved at hearing that He was born who was King of the Jews, and sought to slay the child; but let the whole world be now moved, and arm its power against Him, yet He must declare God's decree, "I have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion." His right must be witnessed, though in the presence of the usurper, and in the very hour of his power.

But now we are led into other and further revelations. This "good confession" being thus witnessed, the Lord was prepared to unfold other parts of the Divine counsels. When He had distinctly verified His title to the kingdom in the face of the world, He was prepared to testify His *present* character and ministry. "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth; every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." His possession of the kingdom was for a time hindered by the unbelief of His nation; but He shows that there had been no failure of the purpose of God by this, for He had come into the world for other present work than to take His throne in Zion. He had come to bear witness unto the truth—and our Gospel is especially the instrument for presenting the Lord in that ministry. As it is said of Him, at the opening of it, "the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the

Father, *he hath declared him.*" He had come into the world that He might say, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." He had come that He might give us an understanding to know Him that is true (1 John v. 20). He had been manifesting the Father's name to those who had been given Him out of the world, and this was the same as bearing witness to the truth (John viii. 26, 27). Every one that was of the truth, as He here speaks to Pilate, had been hearing His voice, His sheep had heard it, while others had believed not, because they were not His sheep. He that was of God had heard it, while others had heard it not, because they were not of God (viii. 47).

Such was the Lord's *present* ministry, while Israel was in unbelief. Though King of the Jews, and, as such, King of the whole earth, He could not as yet take His kingdom, for His title had been denied by His nation. He must take up other ministry, and the character of that ministry He here reveals to Pilate, and had been presenting all through our Gospel.

Thus, this good confession before Pontius Pilate, recorded in this Gospel, still leads the Lord's thoughts quite in the current of this Gospel. While standing to it, consenting for a while to answer for Himself, He still knows Himself in highest and holiest ministry; yea, I may say, His *Divine* ministry, a ministry which none but the Only begotten of the Father, none but He who lay in the bosom of the Father, and who was full of grace and truth, could have fulfilled.

This is still striking; and as we follow Him on to the cross, we have the Son of God still. We see His title to the kingdom verified with all authority. The

enemy would have had it blotted out, but he cannot prevail. Pilate, who before had despised the claims of Jesus, saying to the Jews, "behold your King," will now have them published in all the languages of the earth, and it is not in the power of the Jews to change his mind now, as before. The cross shall be the Lord's standard, and Jehovah will emblazon it with inscriptions of His royal dignity, be the earth never so angry.

But this is the only Gospel that gives us this conversation between Pilate and the Jews about the inscription on the cross ; for it savoured of the *glory* of Jesus. And so it is only our Evangelist who notices the woven coat, which was something that the soldiers would not rend—a little circumstance in itself, but helping still to keep in view (in full harmony with this Gospel generally) the holy dignity of Him who was passing through this hour of darkness.

Here it is, also, that our Lord *lays aside His human affections*. He sees His mother and His beloved disciple near the cross ; but it is only to commend them the one to the other ; and thus to separate Himself from the place which He had once filled among them. Sweet indeed is it, to see how faithfully He owned the affection up to the latest moment that He could listen to it ; no sorrow of His own (though that was bitter enough, as we know) could make Him forget it. But He was not always to know it. The children of the resurrection neither marry, nor are given in marriage. They were not, henceforth, to know Him "after the flesh." He must now form their knowledge of Him by other thoughts, for they are henceforth to be joined to Him as "one spirit : " for such are His blessed ways. If He take His distance from us, as not knowing us in



“the flesh,” it is only that we may be united to Him in nearer affections and closer interests.

And, to look deeper than the *circumstances* of this hour, if we mark the Lord's *spirit* on the cross, we shall still discern the Son of God. He thirsted—He tasted death, it is true—He knew the drought of that land where the living God was not. But His sense of this is still expressed in His own tone. It does not come forth in the cry, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” That is given us in its proper place. But here there is no such cry recorded; there is no amazement of spirit, nor horror of great darkness for three hours; neither is there a commending of Himself to the Father; but it is simply, “I thirst;” and when He had entered and passed through that thirst, He verifies the full accomplishment of all things, saying, “It is finished.” He does not commend His work to the approval of God, but seals it with His own seal, attesting it as complete, and giving it the sufficient sanction of His own approval. And when He could thus sanction all as finished, He delivers up His life Himself.

These were strong touches of the mind in which He was passing through these hours; and these hours now end. The Son of God was now made perfect as the author of eternal salvation to all that obey Him; and the fountain for sin and for uncleanness is opened. The water and the blood came forth to bear witness, that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. (1 John v. 8–12.) We have not here the Centurion's confession, “truly this was the Son of God;” we have not Pilate's wife, nor the convicted lips.

of Judas, bearing Him witness ; Jesus does not here receive witness from men, but from God. The water and the blood are *God's* witnesses to His Son, and to the life that sinners may find in Him. It was sin that pierced Him. The action of the soldier was a sample of man's enmity. It was the sullen shot of the defeated foe after the battle ; the more loudly telling out the deep-seated hatred that there is in man's heart to God and His Christ. But it only sets off the riches of that grace that met it, and abounded over it ; for it was answered by the love of God. *The point of the soldier's spear was touched by the blood.* The crimson flood came forth to roll away the crimson sin. The blood and the water issue through the wounded side of the Son of God. Now was the day of atonement fully come ; and the water of separation, the ashes of the red heifer, were now sprinkled. This was the Lamb which Abel had offered. This was the blood which Noah had shed, and which gave free course to the unmingled grace of God's heart towards sinners. (Gen. viii. 21.) This was the ram of Mount Moriah. And this was the blood which daily flowed round the brazen altar in the temple. This was the blood which is the only ransom of the unnumbered thousands before the throne of God.

But though pierced, thus to be the fountain of the blood and the water, the Lord's body must not be broken. The paschal Lamb may be killed, but not a bone of it is to be broken. It shall do all the purpose of Divine love in sheltering the first born—but beyond that, it is sacred ; no rude hand must touch it. Jesus was to say, “all my bones shall say, LORD, who is like unto Thee, which deliverest the poor from him that is too strong for him—yea, the poor and needy from him

that spoileth him." And the Church is His body. He is the head and we the members; and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, and not a bone of that mystic body is to be wanting: all must come unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. For all, from of old, have been written in God's book, and are to be fashioned and curiously wrought together, even every one of them. (Ps. cxxxix. 16.)

Thus was it with our Lord in our Gospel, while He was yet on the cross. In every feature we see the Son of God. And as we follow Him from thence to the grave, it is the Son of God still. We do not there see Him numbered with the transgressors, and with the wicked in His death; but we do see His grave with the rich. Two honoured sons of Israel come to own Him, and charge themselves with His body, to spend their perfumes and their labour upon it.

But in all this we have again something to notice.

When the Lord's body was pierced, it not only, as I have observed, allowed God's witnesses—the blood and the water—to be heard, but it gives occasion to that which was written, "they shall look on Him whom they pierced." And this word which tells of Israel's repentance in the latter day, introduces the action of Joseph and Nicodemus, and makes them the representatives of repentant Israel. They come *last* in the order of faith. They had been afraid of their unbelieving nation, afraid of the thunder of the synagogue, and had not continued with the Lord in His temptations, but were only secretly His disciples. They were slow of heart; but still, in the end, they do own the Lord,

and are brought to look on Him whom they pierced. They take the body from the cross, fresh with the piercing of the soldier's spear ; and as they lowered it from the tree, surely they must have looked, and looked well, upon the hands, and feet, and wounded side. And they must have mourned as they looked, for their hearts had been already softened to take impression from the crucified One. . And so will it be with Israel. They come last in the order of faith, and are slow of heart ; but in the end, they will look on Him whom they have pierced, and mourn as one mourneth for his only son.

It was thus with Joseph and Nicodemus now, and thus will it be, by-and-by, with the inhabitants of Jerusalem. These two Israelites, as true children of Abraham, claim the body of the Lord, and consecrate it, as with the faith of the Patriarch (Gen. i. 2, 26) ; and, as true subjects of the King of Israel, they also honour it with the honours of a Son of David (2 Chron. xvi. 14). They spend large and costly perfumes upon it, and lay it up in the garden, in a new untainted tomb, on which the smell of death had never yet passed.

Here all closes for the present ; here, in the *second* garden, as I may call it, the second man is now laid in death. In the *first*, the first man had walked with access to the tree of life ; but he had chosen death, in the error of his way. Here, in the second garden, death, the penalty, is met. Jesus, without having touched the tree of knowledge, suffers the death. In the first garden, all manner of trees, good for food and pleasant to the eyes were seen. But here, nothing appears but the tomb of Jesus. This was what man's

sin ended in, as far as man was concerned. But let us wait a little. By all this, the Son of God is soon to become the death of death, and hell's destruction, to bring life and immortality to light, and to plant again in the garden, for man, the tree of life. Let but the third morning arise, and this garden, which now witnesses only Jesus in death, shall see the Son of God in resurrection and victory—in victorious life for sinners.

XX.—Accordingly, at the opening of this chapter, we so find it. Jesus has risen, the bruiser of the serpent; being made through death the destroyer of him that had the power of death.

Here I may turn aside for a moment to observe with what force the Spirit of God, all through Scripture, unfolds the mysteries of life and death. He would impress our souls with a very deep sense of this, that we have lost life, and, as far as we can act, have lost it irrecoverably, but that we have regained it in Christ, and regained it in Him infallibly and for ever.

God is "the living God." As such He is acting in this scene of death. He has come into the midst of it as the living God. How could He have come otherwise? Surely we may say, to the glory of His name, He has not been here, if not in that character. And His victory as the living God in this scene of death is resurrection. If resurrection be denied, God is not known, and that the living God has been here and interfered with the conditions of this ruined, death-stricken world, is denied.

It is blessed to see this; and yet it is a truth very sure and simple. Into Himself as the living God, into

Himself, or the resources which His own glory or nature provided, He has retreated, and there acted apart from the world, and above the scene which has involved itself in death. If His creature have been untrue, His creature of highest dignity, set by Him over the works of His hands, if Adam have disappointed Him, so to speak, revolted from Him, and brought in death, God has (blessed to tell it !) looked to Himself, and drawn from Himself ; and there, in His own resources, in the provisions which He Himself supplies, He finds the remedy. And this is, in His victory as the living God, which victory is resurrection, His own resource of life in despite of the conquests of sin and death, let these conquests take what form they may. This is what He has been doing in this world. Let death appear, let the judgment of sin be ready to be executed, He is seen providing atonement for sin, which is the principle or root of death, and bringing forth a living thing from under the righteous doom and judgment of death. The risen Jesus now seals all this to us.

This was the third, the appointed day—the day on which Abraham of old had received his son as from the dead—the day of promised revival to Israel (Hos. vi. 2)—the day, also, on which Jonah was on dry land again.

But the disciples do not as yet know their Lord in resurrection. They know Him only “after the flesh ;” and therefore Mary Magdalene is seen early at the sepulchre, seeking His body ; and, in the same mind, Peter and his companion ran to the sepulchre shortly after her, their bodily strength merely, and not the intelligence of faith carrying them there. And there they behold, not their object, but the trophies of His

victory over the power of death. There they see the gates of brass and the bars of iron cut in sunder. The linen clothes and the napkin which had been wrapped about the Lord's head as though He were death's prisoner were seen strewing the ground like the spoils of the vanquished, as under the hand of death's conqueror. The very armour of the strong man was made a show of in his own house ; this telling loudly that He who is the plague of death, and hell's destruction, had been lately in that place, doing His glorious work. But, in spite of all this, the disciples understand not ; they as yet know not the scripture, that He must rise from the dead ; and they go away again to their own home.

Mary, however, lingers about the fond spot, refusing to be comforted, because her Lord was not. She would fain have taken sackcloth and, like another, spread it for her on the rock, could she but find His body to watch and to keep it. She wept, and stooped down and looked into the sepulchre, and saw the angels. But what were the angels to her ? The sight of them does not terrify her, as it had the other women (Mark xvi.) ; she was too much occupied with other thoughts to be moved by them. They were, it is true, very illustrious, sitting there in white, and in heavenly state too, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. But what was all splendour to her ? The dead body of her Lord was what she sought and desired alone ; and she has only to turn from these heavenly glories, in further search of it ; and then seeing, as she judged, the gardener, she says to him, " Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him



away." She simply says, "if thou have borne *him* hence," not naming Jesus; for, fond woman as she was, she supposes that every one must be as full of her Lord as she was.

Well, beloved, this may have been but *human* passion and *ignorant* affection; still it was spent on Jesus. And would that something more of the temper of it were shed abroad in our hearts. Her affection sought a right object, though it sought it not wisely; and in the wonted kindness and grace of Him with whom she had to do, He gives her the fruit of it. To her who had, more was given. She had learnt thoroughly the lesson of knowing Christ "after the flesh." She was the truest of all to that; and her Lord will now lead her to richer knowledge of Himself. He will take her up to higher regions than as yet she thought of, to the "mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense" (Cant. vi. 6).

To do this in all gentleness, He first answers her human affection, letting her once again hear her own name on His well-known voice. That was just the note which was in full unison with all that was then in her heart. It was the only note to which her soul could have responded. Had He appeared to her in heavenly glory, He would still have been a stranger to her; for as yet she knew Him only as Jesus. But this must be the last time she was to apprehend Him "after the flesh." For He is now risen from the dead, and is on His way to the Father in heaven, and earth must no longer be the scene of their communion. "Touch me not," says He to her, "for I am not yet ascended to my Father."

I need not, perhaps, observe how fully characteristic

of our Gospel all this is. In St. Matthew, on the contrary, we see the women, on their return from the sepulchre, meeting the Lord, and the Lord allowing them to hold His feet and to worship Him : but here, it is to Mary, "touch me not." For this Gospel tells us of the Son in the midst of the heavenly family, and not in His royalty in Israel and in His earthly glory. The resurrection, it is most true, pledges all that earthly glory and kingdom to Him (Acts xiii. 34) ; but it was also one stage to the heavenly places ; and that is the feature of it which our Gospel gives us.

Mary, as we have seen, is entitled to be the first to learn these greater ways of His grace and love, and also to be the happy bearer of the same good tidings from this far and unknown country to the brethren. Jesus says to her, "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father ; and to my God, and your God."\*

Thus is she honoured, and she goes to prepare the brethren for their Lord, while He prepares to meet them with a blessing beyond all which they had as yet attained. And her tidings seem to have got them all in readiness for Him ; for on His seeing them, the evening of the same day, they are not amazed and in unbelief, as they are in St. Luke's Gospel, but seem all to be waiting and in expectation. They are no longer scattered as before (ver. 10), but folded together as the

\* And here, again, I would notice another characteristic difference in the Gospels. In Matthew, the message was, to meet Him in *Galilee* ; and accordingly the disciples do so—but here, He does not name any place on earth, but simply tells them that He was going to *heaven*, there in spirit to meet them before His Father and their Father, His God and their God.

family of God, and the elder brother enters in, laden with the fruit of His holy travail for them.

This was a meeting indeed. It was a visit to the family of the heavenly Father by the First-born. It was in a place that lay beyond death and outside the world. And such is the place of appointed meeting with our Lord. Those who in spirit stay here never meet Him. For He is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of strangers and pilgrims. The world is a defiled place, and we must meet Him in resurrection, in the kingdom that is not of the world.

So was it here with the Lord and His brethren. He now, for the first time, *really* meets them, meets them in the appointed place outside the world, and meets them in no less character than His own brethren. Now it was that He began to pay His vows. He had made them on the cross (Ps. xxii.). *First*, that He would declare the Father's name to the brethren; *secondly*, that in the midst of the Church He would sing His praise. The first of these He was now beginning to pay, and has been paying all through the present dispensation, making known to our souls the name of the Father through the Holy Ghost. And the second He will as certainly pay, when the congregation of all the brethren is gathered, and He leads their songs in resurrection-joy for ever.

Now also is the promised life actually imparted. "Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me; because I live, ye shall live also." The Son of God, having life in Himself, now comes with it to His saints. He breathes on them now, as of old into their nostrils (Gen. ii.). Only this was the breath of

the second Adam, the quickening Spirit, who had a life to impart that was won from the power of death, and which was therefore beyond its utmost reach. The brethren are now given to know that Christ was in the Father, and they in Him, and He in them. They know the full peace of the cross also. He shows them His hands and His side. Their sorrow is turned into joy, for they were glad “when they saw the Lord.” He was revealing Himself to them, as He does not unto the world. The world, in this little interview, was quite shut out; and the disciples, as hated of the world, are shut up within their own enclosure, just in the place to get a special manifestation of Himself to them, as He had said unto them (xix. 22—24). In the world they were knowing tribulation, but in Him peace.

All this was theirs in this blessed little visit of “the First-born from the dead” to His brethren, imparting to them the blessing which belonged to them *as children*. And thus, this little intercourse was a sample of the communion which we enjoy in this dispensation. Our communion with Christ does not change our condition in the world, or make us happy *in mere circumstances*; it leaves us in a place of trial. But we are happy *in Himself*, in the full sense of His presence and favour. We are taught, as they here were, to know our oneness with Jesus; and, through our adoption, and fellowship with the Father, we enjoy the settled peace of the wounded hands and side of Jesus; we are glad because of Him risen from the dead, and have life in the Holy Ghost—life of the risen Lord imparted to us. As we lately saw the armour of the conquered enemy strewing the distant field of battle, so here do we see the fruit of victory brought home to gladden and assure the

kindred of the conqueror. Poorly indeed some of us know all this.

And these fruits of the victory of the Son of God were now commanded to be carried about in holy triumph all the world over. "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you," says the Lord to His brethren. With a message, not of judgment, but of grace, had He Himself come forth from the Father. And with a commission of the same grace, are the brethren sent forth. They are sent forth from the Lord of life and peace, and with such a ministry they test the condition of every living soul. The message they bear is from the Son of the Father, a message of peace and life secured in and by Himself; and the word then was, and still is, "he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life"—and the Lord adds, making them, in this, the test of the condition of every one, as having the Son or not, "whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained."

Such was the Lord's first interview with His disciples, after He had risen from the dead. It has set before us the saints, as the children of the Father, and their ministry as such, and given us a sample or first-fruits of that harvest in the Holy Ghost, which they have been gathering ever since in this dispensation.

And though it may draw me aside for a little space, I cannot refuse noticing, that the ministry committed to the disciples by the Lord, after He rose from the dead, takes a distinct character in each of the Gospels. And as each of the Gospels has a distinct purpose (according to which all the narratives are selected and recorded), so, the various language used by the Lord

in each of the Gospels, in committing this Ministry to His disciples, is to be accounted for, and interpreted by, the specific character of the Gospel itself.

In St. Matthew this commission runs thus:—“*Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.*” Now this commission was strictly to the Apostles, who had been already ordained by the Lord, and associated with Him as minister of the circumcision (Rom. xv. 8). It contemplated them as in Jerusalem, and going forth from thence for the discipling of *all nations*, and for the keeping of them in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. For it is the purpose of that Gospel to present the Lord in Jewish connection as the hope of Israel, to whom the gathering of the nations was to be. And, accordingly, the conversion of nations, and the settlement of the whole world around Jerusalem as the centre of worship, is assumed. A system of restored and obedient nations rejoicing with Israel will be exhibited by-and-by; and the risen Lord looks to that, when committing ministry to His apostles in the Gospel by Matthew.\*

But in St. Mark, this prospect of national conversion is a good deal qualified. The terms of the commission are these:—“*Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature: he that believeth, and is baptised, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*”

\* I may observe, that Israel had not, as yet, fully shut the door of hope against themselves. The testimony of the Holy Ghost to the risen Jesus by the Apostles at Jerusalem had not as yet been rejected. The possibility of that testimony being received might be assumed; and the Lord seems to do so in Matthew's Gospel.

It is not the discipling of nations that is contemplated, but universal testimony with partial acceptance. For St. Mark presents the Lord in service or ministry, and the case of some receiving the word, and some receiving it not, is anticipated, because such are the results that have attended on all ministry of the word; as it is said in one place, "some believed the things that were spoken, and some believed not."

In St. Luke, the Lord, after interpreting Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms, and opening the understanding of the disciples to understand them, delivers ministry to them in this way:—"Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high."—This commission does not appear to have been strictly to *the eleven*, but others were addressed by it (see Luke xxiv. 33). And their ministry was to begin *with* Jerusalem, and not *from* it. And they are not allowed to go forth in their ministry till they had received new power, thus allowing that what they had received from Jesus, while on earth, was not sufficient. And all this was a breaking away from mere earthly or Jewish order. This was, therefore, the commission with something of an altered character, suitable to this Gospel by Luke, which presents the Lord more abroad, and not strictly in Jewish association.

But now, in our Gospel by St. John, we do not get this commission at all, nor any mention of "the power



from on high.”\* We simply get, as I have been noticing, the life of the risen Man imparted, and then the disciples, with that life in them, sent out to test, by virtue of it, the condition of every living soul. The Lord gives them their ministry as from *heaven*, and not from *the mountain in Galilee*. He sends them forth from *the Father*, and not from *Jerusalem*. For, in our Gospel, the Lord has left all recollections of Jerusalem behind, and has given up, for the present, all hope of restoring Israel and gathering the nations.

This variety in the terms of this commission and ministry is very striking ; and, considering the different purposes of each Gospel, it is exquisite and perfect. The mere reasoner may stumble at it, and the man who honours the Scripture, and would fain preserve its fair reputation, may attempt many ways to shew the *literal* consistency of these things. But the word of God, beloved, does not ask for protection from man. It seeks for no apologies to be made for it, however well-intentioned. In all this there is no incongruity, but only variety : and that variety perfectly answering the divers purposes of the same Spirit. And though thus various, every thought and every word in each is equally and altogether Divine ; and we have only to bless our God, for the sureness, and comfort, and sufficiency of His own most perfect testimonies.

But this, brethren, by the way, desiring that the Lord may keep our minds in all our meditations, and in all the counsels of our hearts.

We left the Lord in company with His brethren.

\* Indeed, the word “Apostles” does not once occur in this Gospel ; and this is still in character with it.

He was putting them into their condition as children of the Father, and raising them to heavenly places. But He has purposes touching Israel, as well as the Church. In the latter day He will call them to repentance and faith, giving them their due standing and ministry also. And these things we shall have now in order unfolded before us.

Thomas, we read, was not with the brethren when the Lord visited them. He did not keep his first estate, but was absent, while the little gathering were holding themselves in readiness for their risen Lord; and now he refuses to believe his brethren, without the further testimony of his own hands and eyes. And the Jews, to this day, like Thomas then, are refusing the Gospel or good tidings of the risen Lord.

All, however, was not to end thus. Thomas recovers his place, and "after eight days" is in company with the brethren again, and then Jesus presents Himself to him. For this second visit was for *Thomas's sake*. And the unbelieving disciple is led to own Him as his Lord and his God. As by-and-by, "after eight days," after a full week or dispensation has run its course, it will be said in the land of Israel, "Lo, this is *our God*; we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is *the Lord*; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation." Israel will own Immanuel *then*; and as the Lord here accepts Thomas, so will He then say of Israel, "Thou art my people."

But here we are to notice something further significant.—The Lord accepts Thomas, it is most true, but at the same time says to him, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed." And so with

Israel in the latter day. They shall know the peace of the cross, the full peace of the wounded hand and side of Jesus here shewn to Thomas; but they shall take a blessing inferior to the Church. They shall get life from the Son of God; but they shall only walk on the footstool, while the saints are sitting on the throne.

Here the mystery of life, whether to the Church now, or to Israel by-and-by, closes, and our Evangelist, accordingly, for a moment pauses. This was the Gospel of Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, which whosoever believeth has life in His name. Many other things might have been added, but these were enough to attest the Son, and thus to be the seed of life. The third witness from God had now been heard. The *water* and the *blood* had come forth from the crucified Son, and now *the Spirit* was given by the risen Son. The three that bear witness on earth had been heard, and the testimony from God, that He "hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son," was therefore complete; and our Evangelist just says, "these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name."

XXI.—Thus have we seen life actually dispensed by the risen Lord to His brethren, and ministry committed to them as such; and we have seen life pledged to Israel in the person of Thomas. But this restored Thomas, or the Israel of God in the latter day, shall (like the Church now) get *ministry* as well as *life*; be *used* as well as *quicken*ed. And we get the pledge of this also now in due order.

In the opening of this chapter we see the Apostles brought back to the condition in which the Lord at first met them. Peter and the sons of Zebedee are again at their fishing. Indeed their former labour had come to nothing. Their nets had broken. The Lord had proposed to use them, but Israel in His hand had proved but a deceitful bow, a broken net. But now they are in their toil again, and the Lord appears again, and gives them a second draught. And on this, in company with the Lord Himself, they feast; and their nets remain unbroken.

And thus will it be with the Israel of God in the latter day. Like Thomas, as we have seen, they shall walk in the light of the Lord, and then, as here, the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto them. Waters shall issue from the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, and fishers shall there stand and spread their nets, and their fish shall be of "the great sea, exceeding many" (Ezek. xlvii. 10). "The great sea," the wide Mediterranean, as the Prophet suggests, and not the narrow lake of Tiberias, shall then employ their nets, and the fish shall be "according to their kinds;" for Midian and Ephah and Kedar and Nebaioth and all lands shall yield their stores then. And the net shall still be ready for other draughts—the unbroken net. One generation shall tell His praise unto another, and shall declare His power.\*

\* Nathanael and Thomas are here joined in the fishing. And this is very significant; for both of these had been, in this Gospel, the representatives of Israel, as we have seen. So that this helps to shew us, that this company of fishermen typify the Jewish ministry of the latter day. John also is named "the son of Zebedee," the name which he bore when first called into his ministry, but a name which he does not bear in any other passage of this Gospel.

Our Evangelist notices that this was “the third time” that Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was risen from the dead. At the *first*, as we saw, He met the brethren to give them, as the heavenly family, their fellowship and ministry. At the *second*, He restored Thomas, the representative of Israel’s final conversion and life. And now, at the *third*, He gives the pledge of Israel’s ministry and fruitfulness unto God.

These three distinct visits give us, after this manner, the full view of the Church and of Israel. But I must particularly notice another acting of the consciousness of love, which is very sweet. Peter knew, in spite of all that had happened, that there was a link between him and the Lord; and Peter therefore is not afraid to be *alone* with Him. The last time they had been together, it is true, Peter had denied Him; and the Lord had turned and looked upon him. But Peter knew that he loved his Lord notwithstanding; and now, he is not afraid to cast himself into the sea and reach Jesus alone, before the rest of them. And there is something truly blessed in this. Law could never have brought this about, nor indeed have warranted it. The rod of the law would have beaten him off, and made him keep his distance. Nothing but grace could allow this: nothing but the cords of love could have drawn denying Peter the nearest to his slighted Lord, after this manner.—But there is more still.

The dinner, as we read, was now ended—the purpose of this third visit was now answered. But in order to close all in wondrous grace and glory, and in a way also most suitable to, and characteristic of, our Gospel,

the Lord turns to Peter, making him again his special object, and addressing him in such a way, as could not and does not, fail to call his sin to remembrance.

Here, however, again I would pause for a little moment.

The Lord had very much to do with Peter, beyond any of the disciples, while He was in the midst of them ; and we find it the same after He had risen. Peter is the one, I may say, that occupies the whole of this 21st chapter of St. John.

The Lord here carries on with him the gracious work He had begun ere He left him, and carries it on exactly from the point where He had left it.

Peter had betrayed self-confidence. Though all should be offended, yet would not he, he said ; and though he should die with his Master, he would not deny him. His Master had told him of the vanity of such boasts, but had told him also of His prayer for him, so that his faith should not fail. And when the boast is found to be indeed a vanity, and Peter denied his Lord even with an oath, his Lord looked on him, and this look had its blessed operation. The prayer and the look had availed. The prayer had kept his faith from failing, but the look had broken his heart. He did not "go away," but he wept, and wept bitterly.

At the opening of this chapter, we find Peter in this condition, the condition in which the prayer and look of his Divine Master had put him. That his faith had not failed, he is enabled to give very sweet proof, for as soon as he hears that it was his Lord who was standing on the shore, he threw himself into the water to reach Him ; not, however, as a penitent, as though he had

not already wept, but as one who could trust himself in His presence, the presence of his once denied Master, in full assurance of heart.

The prayer and the look had thus already, as we now see, done their work with Peter, and they are not to be repeated. The Lord simply goes on with His work thus begun, to conduct it to perfection.

Accordingly the prayer and the look are now followed by the *word*. Restoration now follows conviction and tears. Peter is put into the place of strengthening his brethren, as his Lord had once said to him, and also into the place of glorifying God by his death, a privilege he had forfeited by his unbelief and denial. This was the word of restoration following the prayer which had already sustained Peter's faith, and the look which had already broken his heart.

But further, as to this case, one of deep interest to our souls.

In the day of John xiii. the Lord had taught this same loved Peter, that a washed man need not to be washed again, but only his feet. And exactly in this way, He now deals with him. He does not again put him through the process of Luke v. when the draught of fishes overwhelmed him, and he found out that he was a sinner; but He restores him and puts him into his place again. That is, He washes Peter's feet, as one whose body was washed already.

Perfect Master! we may say, as with worshipping admiration—the same to us yesterday, to-day, and for ever; the same in gracious skill of love, going on with the work He had afore begun, as the risen Lord resuming the service which He had left unfinished when He was taken from them; and resuming it at the very



point, knitting the past and the present service in the fullest grace and skill !

The three denials of his Lord seem to be quite brought to mind, when Jesus, the third time, says to him, "lovest thou me." But the Lord, as we have been observing, was only fully restoring the soul, and leading His saint to richer blessing. He restores him to his ministry, for another was not to take *his* bishoprick ; and then pledges him strength to serve his Lord in it, without a second denial or failure. He constitutes him His witness and servant in the full power of a martyr's faith. And having pledged this grace to him, that he should thus witness for Him faithfully even unto death, He says to him, "follow me."\*

This was a moment of sweetest interest. We know that if we suffer with Him, we shall reign with Him ; and if we follow Him, where the Lord Himself is, there His servant shall be. Now this call on Peter was a call to follow His Lord along the path of testimony and suffering, in the power of resurrection, to the rest in which that path ends, and to which that resurrection leads. Jesus had said to Peter before He left him, "whither I go, thou canst not follow me now, but thou shalt follow me afterwards" (chap. xiii.). And the Lord, as we know, was then going to heaven and the Father, through the cross. This present call was, in spirit, making good that promise to Peter. It was a call on him to follow the Lord, through death, up to the Father's house. And upon saying these words to

\* Jesus knew *all* things, and that was Peter's comfort. Peter was sure that his Lord knew the *depths* as well as the *surfaces* of things, and thus that He knew what was in His poor servant's *heart* though his *lips* had so transgressed.

him, the Lord rises from the place where they had been eating, and Peter, thus bidden, rises to follow Him.

John listens to this call, as though it had been addressed to him also, and on seeing the Lord rise and Peter rise, he at once rises also. For he ever lay nearest the Lord. He leaned on His breast at supper, and was the disciple whom Jesus loved. He ever stood in the place of closest sympathy with Him. His eye touched his Lord's eye, his mouth His mouth, his hand His hand. And thus by a kind of necessity (blessed necessity!) on the Lord's rising, he rises, though unbidden.

In such an attitude we now see them. The Son of God has risen and is walking out of our sight, and Peter and John are following Him. All this is lovely, and significant beyond expression. We do not see the end of their path, for while thus walking the Gospel closes. The cloud, as it were, receives them out of our sight. We gaze in vain after them, and the path of the disciples is just as far removed from us as that of their Lord. It was, in principle, the path that leads to the Father's house, which we know is prepared for the Lord and His brethren, the presence of God in heaven.

Surely we may say the bridegroom at our feast has kept the best wine until now. If our souls could enter into this, there is nothing like it. St. Mark, in his Gospel, tells us of the fact of the Lord being received up into heaven (xvi. 19); and St. Luke shews us the ascension itself, while the Lord was lifting up His hand and blessing His disciples (xxiv. 51). But all that, sweet as it was, is not equal to what we get here. For all *that* left the disciples apart from their Lord. He was then going to heaven, but they were to return to

Jerusalem ; but here, they are following Him up to heaven. Their path does not stop short of the full end of His.

This is none other than the "gate of heaven" to which our Gospel conducts us, and whereat it leaves us. The Lord is in this place, in fullest grace to His chosen. The receiving of the brethren into the Father's house is here pledged to us. In this, Peter and John are the representatives of us all, beloved. Some, like Peter, may glorify God by death, and others, as is intimated here to John, will be alive and remain till Jesus come ; but all are to follow, whether Peter or John, Moses or Elias, whether asleep in Jesus or quick at His coming, all shall be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air, and be for ever with Him. It will be to them, like the ascension of Enoch before the flood. And being received unto Himself, they will go with Him into the prepared mansions of the Father's house, as He has said unto us.\*

And I may observe this is the only view of our Lord's ascension which our Gospel gives us. But it is that view of it which is strictly in character with the whole Gospel, which gives us, as has been observed, our Lord Jesus in connection with the Church as the family of the Father, the heavenly household. For this ascension is not so properly to the right hand of God, or place of power, where He abides alone, but to the Father's house, where the children are to dwell also. Their path in that direction reaches as far as His,

\* We must not assert that any individual *will* remain till the Lord come. That is condemned by verse 23. But the same verse allows us to assert that the Lord *may* come before our death, if He please.

through His boundless grace ; as here, as I have already noticed, wherever it was that Jesus went (some spot unknown and untold as to this earth), there did Peter and John follow Him. He is here acting as though He had gone and prepared the promised mansions in the Father's house, and had come again, and was now receiving them unto Himself, that where He is, there they might be also. And this will be really so, at the resurrection of those who are Christ's at His coming, when the brethren meet their Lord in the air. The Son of God was now, at the end, as He had done in the beginning, shewing His own *where He dwelt* (see chap. i. 33) ; only, at the beginning, He was a stranger on earth, and they abode with Him but one day, now He is returning to His proper heaven, and there they are to abide with Him for ever.\*

Our Evangelist then just lets us hear the full response of the believing hearts of all God's elect to those truths and wonders of grace which had now been told out. "We know that his testimony is true." They set to their seal that God is true. And all this is then closed with a simple note of admiration—for such, in principle, I judge the last verse to be. And indeed this is all he could do. Was it not beyond his praise ! What heart could conceive the full excellence of His ways, whose name he had now been publishing ?

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Here the fourth section of our Gospel ends ; and here the whole ends. And what a journey through it

\* We have no mention in this Gospel of "the coming of the Son of Man." That is spoken of in Matthew and the others, for that expresses the Lord's coming to *the earth* again, for judgment on the nations, and for deliverance to the remnant, and does not imply the rapture of the saints into the air.

has that of the Son of God been? Made flesh at the beginning, He walked on earth as the Stranger from heaven, save as He was occupied in ministering grace and healing to sinners. The prince of this world at length came to Him; but, finding nothing in Him, he cast Him out of the world. But this he could not do, until, as the Saviour, the Son of God had accomplished the peace of all that trust in Him. Then, He triumphantly broke the power of death; and, as the risen Lord, imparted the life which He had won for His people.—And, finally, by a significant action pledged to them that where He was going, there they should follow Him, that they might be with Him where He was, and that, as we know, for ever.

Our Gospel began with the descent of the Son, and closes with the ascent of the saints. And the time of this ascent, or being taken into the air, I judge is altogether uncertain. It may be to-morrow, and will be when the fulness of the Gentiles shall have come in, when all the saints have been brought, in the unity of the faith, to a perfect man. It does not depend on a certain lapse of time. No prophecy which involves computation of time, I believe, belongs to it. Such belongs to the Lord's return to the earth, and not to the taking of the saints into the air to meet Him. At that return of the Lord to the earth, the saints will be with Him; and this earth will then be prepared to be their common kingdom and inheritance. And that return, I grant, must await its prescribed time, and the full spending out of the days and years announced by the prophets. But no days or years measure out the interval from the ascension of the Lord to that of His saints. The Holy Ghost, it is most true, has given

us *moral* characters of certain times, thus defining “the latter times,” and “the last days” (1 Tim. iv. ; 2 Tim. iii., &c.); but He tells us also that even then, “the last time” had already come (1 John ii. 18). So that faith is entitled to look for her joy in meeting the Lord in the air every hour; with patience the while, to do the will of God. And the prophecies that compute time (as far as they are still future), will not (I merely give my judgment) begin to be applied, or the times they notice begin to run, till this rapture into the air take place. Then, indeed, the suffering remnant in Israel may begin to number out the days for their comfort and for food of hope; and in their deepest sorrow lift up their heads, as knowing that their salvation draweth nigh.

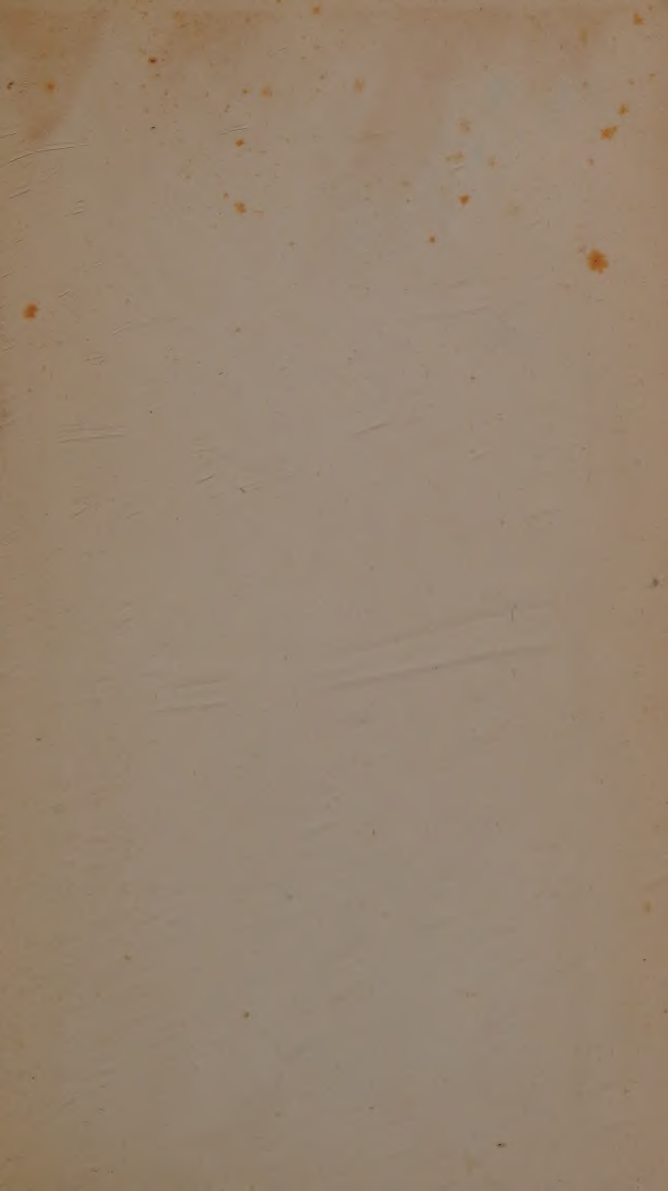
After all this, beloved, our God may well claim our confidence, and be our title to full holy liberty, and our sure and constant source of gladness. This is to honour Him as *the Father*. And if we have a thought of Him that leaves a sting behind it, it is the thought of foolishness and of unbelief. All is brightness to faith. Such is God our Father. And in *the Son* of His love we are accepted. “He’ll not live in glory, and leave us behind”—and the language of our hearts towards Him abidingly should be, “Come, Lord Jesus.” And this confidence of present adoption, and this joy of hope, we have through *the Holy Ghost* who dwelleth in us, our Companion by the way, our “other Comforter,” till the Bridegroom meet us.

To our gracious God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be glory for ever and ever! Amen.









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